FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ACADEMIC RESILIENCE OF FORMER

HOMELESS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS:  A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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by

Linda M. Hart

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**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this to my family, who were so patient with me as I traveled through this journey for six years. To my husband, Jackie, who held out through this process. His work schedule, combined with my work/school scheduled seemed like we were two ships passing in the night, literally. My children Mandy, Ryan, and Dylan who inspired me the entire time, and always have. I only hope I can inspire them, as well. My son-in-law Patrick and daughter-in-law Kat, who may have wondered what kind of crazy mother-in-law they had for being in school so long. I also dedicate this to my grandchildren Ethan, Ehren, Audrey, Tyler, and Paige, who have missed out on many sleepovers. I promise to make it up to you! You'll have NaNa back now!

I also dedicate this to my parents. I know my dad is watching over me with pride. He was always proud of our accomplishments! My mom encouraged me along the way and I'm happy she's still here at 88 to see me complete it! We're never too old to follow our dreams! Love y'all!

Finally, I dedicate this to the former homeless students that were willing to tell their stories, and to those that go unnoticed. I'm listening.

# ABSTRACT

Hart, Linda M., *Factors contributing to academic resilience of former homeless high school students: A phenomenological study*. Doctor of Philosophy (Counselor Education), May, 2017, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Homelessness is an increasing epidemic afflicting the United States. Of the millions of homeless in the United States, over two million are children (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009; Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erden, & Serocivh, 2009). It is reported that over 1.2 million of homeless students are enrolled in public schools (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2014). Researchers have demonstrated that homeless students score significantly lower than normally housed students (Buckner, 2008; Hendricks & Barkley, 2011, & Obradović, et al., 2009), and homeless students are at risk of developmental delays at a rate of four times their peers (Holgersson-Shorter, 2010). Despite the overwhelming odds against them, some homeless students are personally resilient and thrive in the face of adversity, achieving academic excellence, resulting in academic resilience.

Theoretical framework for my phenomenological study included the self-efficay (Bandura, 1977, 1987, & 1989) and self-determination theories. Participants in my study were identified as homeless while attending high school, achieved academic resilience, and they are all currently attending universities. My study focused on motivating factors contributing to academic resilience in my participants. Interviews and sandtray therapy sessions were conducted, resulting in five emerging themes from the transcripts and photos of the processed sandtrays; (a) isolation, (b) confusion, (c) faith, (d) determination, and (e) academic achievement.

Although the homeless population faces many challenges, homeless youth face additionally challenges, including poor academic achievement (Toro, Dworksky, & Fowler, 2007; Hardy, 2009). The participants in my study overcame the obstacles due to the emerging resiliency and motivating factors. Vast research conducted on homelessness was concerning challenges and low academic achievement among the population. The lack of research concerning high achieving homeless students limited the ability to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Each of my participants went unidentified as homeless until their senior year of high school. It is imperative that school officials; including teachers, school counselors, administrators, and district personnel be more efficient in identifying homeless students. An in-depth study of homeless high school students may reveal necessary implications for school officials regarding the needs and identification factors of homeless students.

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**CHAPTER I**

**Introduction**

Homelessness is an increasing epidemic afflicting the United States. The *visible* homeless are those that are seen sleeping on the streets, under a bridge, in a park, or other improvised arrangements; conversely homelessness goes beyond the visible. Homeless are primarily seen as individuals, however, there are growing numbers of families (including former middle-class families) that are now finding themselves in the same condition (Hardy, 2009), adding to the already bleak state of homelessness. Due to the nature of homelessness, it is impossible to determine the exact number, however it is estimated that more than two million children in the United States are identified as homeless (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015) and the number has grown significantly in recent years (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2015). Included in these numbers are children that have been kicked out by parents, guardians, or institutions, resulting in tens of thousands living on their own (Fernandes, 2007). It is reported that over 1.2 million of homeless students are now enrolled in public schools (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2014).

Many homeless students go unidentified for various reasons, including (a) embarrassment, (b) family secrets, (c) fear, and (d) shame, to name a few (Hall, 2007). Because homelessness is often self-reported, many homeless youth go unrecognized and underserved. These unidentified students do not receive the resources and opportunities available to them, which may result in poor academic achievement (Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007; Ammerman et al., 2004).

**Homeless Students**

Although homelessness is traditionally understood as those living on the streets, the term has a much broader spectrum as identified in the school districts. Students may have a roof over his or her head, but not have a home. For example, homeless youth may sleep at a relative's home or a friend's home for short periods of time. Quite often, these students do not stay long at one place, as to not overstay their welcome. He or she may find couches or extra beds wherever they can, never having a home of their own. The many examples of homeless students not only include those that have been kicked out, but also students whose parents are incarcerated, addicted to drugs, or otherwise incapacitated, whereas they cannot care for their children (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth [NAEHCY]/First Focus, 2010). Additionally, other homeless students have been identified as those who left home on their own, *runaways;* even though they may have done so due to unsafe circumstances (Mallett, 2009). Included as such runaways are homeless students who have crossed the United States-Mexico border alone in search of safety, and possibly an education (Hennessy-Fiske, 2014). According to Hennessey-Fiske (2014, p. A1), "the number of unaccompanied young migrants nearly doubled in the last three years, overwhelming local shelters and filling local immigration courts". The dangers that young migrants may face during their travels are insurmountable, including physical violence, sexual attacks, hunger, exposure to the elements, and death (Holmes, 2010).

Homeless students are not always identified immediately, as previously mentioned. They are often embarrassed or withdrawn, unable, or unwilling, to communicate their situation to those they consider to have authority. Quite often, the

voices of homeless students go unheard. The purpose of my study was to give voice to my former homeless participant, allowing them to share their experiences through their reflective perspective.

**Challenges of Homeless Students**

It has been acknowledged that many students are identified as homeless. Because of the multiple aforementioned factors that may contribute to their state of homelessness, including domestic violence, parental incarceration, natural disasters, economic hardships, and illegal immigration (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009), homeless students face personal and academic challenges that their peers with stable residences do not (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

**Personal challenges.** Personal challenges include economic hardships, lack of proper medical care, food insecurity, psychological distress, difficulties within the family, and lack of decent clothing, to name a few (Berlinger, 2009). Students facing these hardships often use school as their safe haven; a place of comfort, belonging, or security. Although many of these students may not actively participate in risky behaviors, they are exposed to several risk factors, including emotional and behavioral problems, physical and/or sexual victimization, criminal activity, and high school dropout rates, which are all related to homelessness (Fowler et al., 2011). Rather than participate in risky behavior, which is prevalent among students in poverty (American Psychological Association, 2015), many homeless students choose, instead, to continue on the path of personal and academic excellence. Academic achievements may be more difficult for homeless students based on their socioeconomic status, which is mainly within the poverty range

(Fowler, P. J., Toro, P. A., & Miles, B. W., 2009). Homeless students lack resources predominantly available to students who have stable residences (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

  **Academic challenges.** The obstacles in their day-to-day lives are challenging, yet many homeless students continue to achieve academically for personal gain. Poor academic achievement has been recorded for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Murphy & Tobin, 2011), thus contributing to the dropout rate. These students are also at risk for developmental delays, grade repetition, and learning disabilities (Holgersson-Shorter, 2010). Although it is understood that homeless students are identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, they face additional obstacles that are exponentially higher than their economic status alone. Predictably, students from lower socioeconomic status traditionally have lower academic achievements, and homeless students often fare even lower (Obradović, et al., 2009). Supporting this deduction, researchers demonstrate homeless students scored significantly lower than normally housed students (Buckner, 2008; Hendricks & Barkley, 2011, & Obradović, et al., 2009). Furthermore, developmental delays for homeless students are at a rate of four times that of their peers (Holgersson-Shorter, 2010).

  Healthy development is positively related to nurturing relationships with adults (Wentzel, Baker, & Russell, 2009). Although homeless students primarily do not have nurturing relationships with adults in their personal lives, adults in schools can offer such relationships if they are aware of the student's situation. The challenges faced by school districts concerning homeless students include how best to serve the students' needs as the homeless student population continues to grow (Aviles de Bradley, 2011).

School counselors may play a role in identifying homeless students. A school counselor is often one of the first adults a student meets in a new school. Because homeless students may not identify themselves, counselors often do not recognize the status of the students. The secrecy of homelessness adds to the concept that these students may not be identified and therefore, not offered the help that is available to them (Hall, 2007). Without the help, including food, clothing, and possible housing face adversities that may impair their academic achievements. However, regardless of low socioeconomic and homeless status, many students in this situation thrive in the face of adversity (Cutuli, J., Herbers, J., Hinz, E., Masten, A., Obradovic, J., & Wenzel, A., 2014) personally and academically, thus achieving academic resilience, which was the foundation for my study.

**Statement of the Problem**

Homelessness is a universal societal issue. Although the exact number is impossible to determine, in the United States, alone, there are nearly three million reported homeless. Included in those numbers are an alarming percentage of homeless families with children. Of those families, 84% are headed by single mothers, and 50% of those are the result of domestic violence (Mallet, 2009). Homeless children are not always in a family, however. Many children are living with friends, extended family, or other circumstances, rendering them homeless (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

Residential instability and lower socioeconomic status have been directly linked to, among other things, lack of academic achievement (Hebers et al., 1997; Poland, 2011; Rafferty et al., 2004); however, many homeless students achieve academic success in high school and continue their academic success in college. Students that meet criteria for

homelessness will either fall into the law of averages (low academic achievement), or exemplify academic resilience in spite of their residency status. Because school districts identify students' residency status according to various methods, a homeless youth may go inadvertently unidentified.

For purposes of my study, and for clarification, I used one specific southern Texas school district as I am referring to high school counselors' identification of homeless students. Currently, high school counselors inherit cumulative academic records of students. As students enter high school, their records are sent from middle schools, or from high schools from which a student transferred. Counselors check to make sure students are on the proper path for graduation, scrutinizing selected courses, academic credits, and graduation plans. At this time, each counselor is responsible for over four hundred students on their caseload.

Although homeless students traditionally have lower academic achievements than students with stable residences, many homeless students excel in school. These students thrive personally and academically in the face of adversity and epitomize academic resilience. It has been documented in several studies that homelessness is a condition for many students and that many of these students excel academically (Cutuli, J., Herbers, J., Hinz, E., Masten, A., Obradovic, J., & Wenzel, A., 2014). However, in my review of the literature, I determined a paucity of research in the area of academic resilience of homeless students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The scarcity of research in this area offers a gap in the literature. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of academic resilient college students who

were identified as homeless while in high school. There are motivating factors that drive homeless youth to thrive, personally and academically, regardless of their adverse situation. Based on combined literature concerning homelessness, academic achievement, and resilience, my expectation was to find common experiences and motivational themes among the participants' experiences. Although there are various modalities of exploration, the participants' experiences will be unearthed using a semi-structured interview and the modality of sandtray, a counseling technique derived from, and included in, play therapy.

**Significance of the Study**

This study was predicted to provide an understanding of the experiences of homeless students; what keeps them motivated, and ultimately providing them the catalyst to attend college by proving to be academically resilient. The results of this study may be valuable to counselors working with identified homeless students. Counselors may use research findings; common factors, or themes, beneficial for understanding the motivational factors behind academic resilience. Furthermore, counselors may determine additional means of identifying homeless youth, who otherwise may not self-identify.

Although literature is abundant in areas of homelessness, academic performance, low socioeconomic status, and resilience (APA, 2015; Buckner, 2012; Buckner, et al., 2001; Hardy, 2009; Hendricks & Barkley, 2011; Masten, et al. 2014; Obradovic, et al. 2009; Richardson, 2002), the literature fails to link the variables with academic resilience. Therefore, academic resilience has not been determined, by definition, according to explored literature. Additionally, students who have been identified as

homeless will benefit from counselors' understanding of the students' experiences and needs.

**Definition of Terms**

Definitions of terms in my study are necessary to provide clarity and understanding of the terms used throughout the study.

**Academic resilience.** Academic resilience has various definitions, depending on how the term is used. Although there is no reference to the term in a dictionary, (Morales & Trotman, 2004) define academic resilience as "educational achievement outcome anomalies that occur in certain groups of students when they have been exposed to statistical risk factors". For purposes of this study, I used the definition given by Morales & Trotman as it pertains to unaccompanied homeless youth in high school.

**Extrinsic motivation.** Extrinsic motivation refers to the tendency to perform activities for known external rewards, whether they be tangible (e.g., money) or psychological (e.g., praise) in nature (Brown, 2007).

**Homeless.** Although there are various definitions for homelessness, for purposes of my study, I used the definition provided by the McKinney-Vento Program, authorized under Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act, 2001), which defines homeless youth as "those who lack fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence." Additional criteria under the McKinney-Vento Act will be described further.

**Homeless student.** For purposes of my study, the term homeless student will refer to a student who was identified as homeless while attending high school, according to the definition used in my study.

**Intrinsic motivation.** Intrinsic motivation is the undertaking of an activity without external incentive; also, personal satisfaction derived through self-initiated achievement (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

**Miniature.** The term *miniature* is used to define the small items used by clients during a sandtray session. The miniature items are used as representations, or symbols, of the client's world. A microcosm of the client's world is designed by the client using miniature items. Homeyer & Sweeney (2011) describe several categories of miniatures to be used by clients during a sandtray sessions, including people, animals, vegetation, buildings, vehicles, fences, signs, natural items, fantasy characters, spiritual pieces, landscaping objects, and household pieces. Additionally, the collection will contain miscellaneous miniatures that may be representative to the lives of my participants in my study, including items such as a trash can, park bench, garage, wine bottles, medicine bottles, and food items, among others.

**Resilience.** Resilience is defined by Merriam-Webster (2013) as a) the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens; and b) the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, bent, etc. Yet another definition is "a psychological process developed in response to intense life stressors that facilitates healthy functioning" (Johnson, et al., 2009). Finally, the definition, for purposes of my study, was "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990, p. 426). Although resilience has varied definitions, there is basically the same underlying meaning.

**Sandplay Categorical Checklist for Sandplay Analysis (SCC)**. "The SCC is a sandplay assessment tool composed of qualitative, descriptive categories that amplify specific aspects of sandplay construction. It contains a detailed listing of all known modes of expression in the making of a sandtray with a focus on patterns of change from one tray to the next." (Grubbs, 2005).

**Sandtray**. Derived from Jungian analytical play therapy, sandplay was originated by Margaret Lowenfeld and Dora Kalff (Boik & Goodwin, 2000; Homeyer & Sweeney, 2011; Schaefer, 2003; & Turner, 2005)). According to Homeyer & Sweeney (2011), *sandtray* indicates an eclectic approach to the use of sand and miniatures as a therapeutic modality. The terms are used interchangeably in this study; they each portray an expressive therapeutic practice of nonverbal therapy using the sandtray modality, which offers clients the opportunity to construct a three-dimensional microcosm scene within the sand (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2011).

**Self-determination.** The free choice of one's own acts or states without external compulsion (Merriam-Webster, 2016). Deci & Ryan's (1975) parallel in reference to the self-determination theory that concerns the motivation behind choices people make without external influence and interference.

**Self-efficacy.** Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task.

**Theoretical Framework**

My study is based on the following theories; (a) self-efficacy theory, and b) self-determination theory. Together, these theories offer the foundation, which may support students who exemplify academic resilience.

**Self-efficacy theory.** The self-efficacy theory is derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977, 1986, & 1989). Bandura's description of self-efficacy encompasses the concepts behind the theory:

> The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness determines whether they will even try to cope with difficult situations. People fear and avoid threatening situations they believe themselves unable to handle, whereas they behave affirmatively when they judge themselves capable of handling situations that would otherwise intimidate them. Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. Those who persist in performing activities that are subjectively threatening, but relatively safe objectively, will gain corrective experiences that further reinforce their sense of efficacy thereby eventually eliminating their fears and defensive behavior (Bandura, 1977, pp. 79-80).

Bandura (1977) hypothesized that the determining factor of coping behaviors is the expectation of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) also affirmed that self-efficacy was the foundation for the length of substantiation of behavior in the face of obstacles and unpleasant experiences. Unaccompanied homeless students' perceived self-efficacy might very well be the foundation of their resilience in the face of adversity. Students who thrive academically exhibit resilient characteristics that kindle their self-determination to succeed. Resilience, intrinsic motivation, and self-determination are key characteristics of the foundation for which much of the literature is derived.

**Self-determination theory.** The self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro-theory of human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1975). According to research conducted on

SDT, various factors can either "facilitate self-motivation and well-being, or thwart initiative and positive experience across diverse settings, domains, and cultures" (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 9). Additionally, the theory "assumes that people are active organisms with inherent and deeply evolved tendencies toward psychological growth and development. Clearly evident in the phenomenon of intrinsic motivation" (Deci, 2009). A study lasting over twenty years revealed "autonomy support from a teacher neables the self-determined motivation in students" (Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999, p. 537).

Literature concerning motivating factors for homeless students is sparse, however, researchers have suggested that parents who are autonomy supportive value, and encourage, their children's autonomy (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). In order to survive and thrive, homeless students must have their basic needs, as well as their psychological needs, met. The self-determination theory is based on three essential psychological needs: a) autonomy, b) relatedness, and c) competence. (Desi & Ryan, 2009). Most high school students have a caring adult, whether a parent or relative, to help meet their basic and psychological needs. However, for homeless students to achieve these needs, they must possess a form of self-determination and self-motivation. Without parents in the picture, homeless students must have something that keeps them internally motivated. According to Deci & Ryan, there are three ways to be internally motivated: (a) introjection, (b) identification, and (c) intrinsic motivation.

**Research Question**

What are the contributing factors leading to academic resilience of former homeless high school students?

**Limitations**

This phenomenological study was limited to the self-report data obtained by the participants. The nature of self-reporting limits the results Furthermore, because this study was based on willing participants, their lived experiences may vastly differ from those that chose not to participate. Additionally, the participants' duration and causes of homelessness may vary, which may diminish the transferability of the results (Creswell, 2012).

Because the processing and analyzing of sandtrays are not standardized, it is necessary to utilize the Sandplay Categorical Checklist for Sandtray Analysis to assess themes, along with the participants' narratives during their creation of the sandtrays. Sandtrays are open to interpretation and subjectivity, both of which are additional limitations to this study.

Finally, in a phenomenological study, relatively few participants are required, resulting in limiting the study to the voices of the few participants.

**Delimitations**

Participation in this study was delimited to students who are (a) 18 years of age, or older, (b) identified by TEA as unaccompanied, homeless youth while in high school, and (c) currently enrolled in a college or university. Students who do not meet all the criteria will not be considered for the study.

**Assumptions**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), "Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist" (p. 62). The following assumptions were conducted in this research study:

1. Participants will understand the scope of the study and will be honest and accommodating with self-reports.

2. Participants will be given consent forms; understanding they may withdraw from the study at any time, without ramifications.

3. Participants will be given complete anonymity and any notes or tapes collected for data will be destroyed after the study is complete.

4. Participants will be selected from colleges or universities in southeast Texas.

5. Participants will understand the nature of sandtray therapy and use miniatures to create a microcosm of their lived experiences.

**Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters and organized in the following manner. Chapter I contains the introduction of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, research question, limitations, delimitations, organization of the study, and a summary. In Chapter II, the review of literature pertaining to prevalence of homelessness, factors contributing to students' homelessness, challenges faced by homeless students, academic achievement, and academic resilience will be discussed, along with the various definitions of homelessness. Chapter III consists of the methodology used to conduct this study, including the research design, selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis of the study, summary and conclusion. Chapter IV contains a description of the demographic data and analysis of the study. Finally, Chapter V will includes the summary of the qualitative research, discussion of the results, implications for counselors working with homeless youth, and recommendations for further research.

**CHAPTER II**

**Review of the Literature**

In this chapter I present support for conducting a phenomenological research study on the experiences of college students who were identified as homeless while in high school. The population of homeless school-age youth in the United States embraces a challenging social issue (Miller, 2011). Despite the many definitions of homelessness, persons meeting criteria face many challenges. According to the Texas Educational Agency, students may meet the criteria of homelessness, based on the results of a student residency questionnaire (Texas Education Agency, 2013). Regardless of which criteria of homelessness the students meet eligibility; their socioeconomic status predominantly remains below poverty. Residential instability and lower socioeconomic status have been directly linked to, among other things, lack of academic achievement (Hebers et al., 1997; Poland, 2011; Rafferty et al., 2004); however, many homeless students achieve academic success in high school and continue their academic success in college (Cutuli, J., Herbers, J., Hinz, E., Masten, A., Obradovic, J., & Wenzel, A., 2014). Students that meet criteria for homelessness will either fall into the law of averages (low academic achievement), or exemplify academic resilience in spite of their residency status (Hall, 2007). Resilience in the face of hardship is essential for one to succeed; to rise above homelessness and poverty. In my study, I explored the experiences of former homeless high school students who epitomized academic resilience, and continued to thrive academically in a college or university setting. Literature on homeless students attaining academic resilience is sparse; however examining the literature may link the relationship between homelessness, low socioeconomic status, resilience, and academic achievement.

The following literature review signifies the literature relevant to my qualitative research study. Chapter II is organized into sections: (a) prevalence of homelessness, (b) homelessness, (c) factors contributing to students' homelessness, (e) challenges faced by homeless students, (f) theoretical framework, (g) motivation, (h) individual resiliencies, (i) resilience, (j) academic achievement, (k) academic resilience, and () summary of chapter.

**Prevalence of Homelessness**

Homelessness rates in the United States are staggering, with almost half of the reported homeless including families with children (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015). This subpopulation of homeless families continues to increase, creating more homeless youth than ever previously reported (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2015). Although states are required to collect data from 60% of youth who have *aged-out* of foster care, it is difficult locate them, making the number of homeless youth even more challenging to determine (National Youth in Transition database, 2012). More than two million children in the United States are classified as homeless (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015) and the number has grown significantly in recent years (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2015). The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reports a significantly lower number of homeless in the United States on any given night, most likely due to the nature in which they obtain their numbers (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2013). Because the numbers are self-reported by communities, the exact number of people experiencing homelessness is difficult to determine, and numerous homeless families and youth remain under the radar (Miller, 2011).

**Homelessness**

According to the McKinney-Vento Act homeless youth are defined as those who *lack fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence.* The definition encompasses the many aspects of homelessness, including: Children and youth who are: (a) sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as *doubled-up*); (b) living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; (c) living in emergency or transitional shelters, (d) abandoned in hospitals, or (e) awaiting foster care placement. Additionally, the definition of a homeless youth, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act also includes children and youth who (f) have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, and (g) living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings. Finally, included in the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless youth are (h) migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above (Texas Education Agency, 2014).

Unaccompanied, undocumented students who arrive in the United States illegally are not specifically covered under this act; however, they are included as homeless migratory children, if they meet the criteria (Carlson, Cacciatore, & Klimek, 2012). This is important to note because there are approximately 1.8 million undocumented students under the age of 18 currently attending school in the United States (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010). It is imperative to identify students that may be classified as homeless, because they are eligible for benefits through the McKinney-

Vento program, which is a federally funded program designed to address the problems that homeless children and youth have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school (Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program, 2004). The McKinney-Vento program allows homeless students to have access to an education and provides transportation, along with available resources to homeless students, if they are identified (Miller, 2011; National Center for Homeless Education, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has reauthorized the McKinney-Vento program, originally authorized in 1987. The McKinney-Vento program also stresses the importance of determining a student's homeless status on a case-by-case basis, because situations vary, and additional circumstances may qualify the student as homeless, as well. The program provides services to homeless students in the United States' public school system. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2013) defines homeless as people or households who are unable to acquire and/or maintain housing they can afford. Meriam-Webster (2013) defines homeless as persons who lack permanent housing. Yet another definition of homeless (the definition on which this study is based) comes from the Texas Education Agency, the agency from which Texas public schools obtain their codes. In the state of Texas, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) generates a residency questionnaire to assist in identifying homeless, or unaccompanied youth. Independent public school districts require students to complete the questionnaire near the beginning of each school year. However, many students do not return the questionnaire, subsequently falling into the proverbial crack in the system. According to the residency questionnaire, students who have living conditions meeting any of the following criteria are considered as homeless: (a) living in home or apartment,

in Section 8 housing, or in military housing with parent(s), legal guardian(s), or caregiver(s) with no electricity and/or running water; (b) in the home of a friend or relative because loss of housing, (c) in a shelter due to lack of permanent housing, (d) in transitional housing, (e) in a hotel or motel, (f) in a tent, car, van, abandoned building, on the streets, at a campground, in the park, or other unsheltered location (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Additionally, there is a box for students to check if they are homeless, or unaccompanied, for other reasons not mentioned. Students then turn in the questionnaire to be processed and those considered homeless by the aforementioned conditions are identified by their school district's homeless liaison.

Children identified as unaccompanied or homeless, or living among homeless families, often go unrecognized in schools, especially in the high school setting. Unaccompanied homeless high school students are not always willing to disclose their personal living conditions for various reasons, including (a) stigma attached to homelessness, (b) embarrassment, and (c) fear of being ridiculed or taken away, and (d) directive by parents not to disclose the information, to name a few (Hall, 2007). Families with children, homeless adolescents, and unaccompanied youth, find themselves homeless for numerous reasons, but virtually never by choice.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2013) defines homeless as people or households who are unable to acquire or maintain housing they can afford. Although Merriam-Webster (2013) defines the term homeless as having no home or permanent place of residence. The definition of homeless tends to differ because there is no universal understanding of what constitutes homelessness (Hendricks & Barkley, 2011). The federal definition of homeless child and youth comprises of (a) minors living

in shelters, with or without family; (b) doubling up with friends or extended family, (c) settling into motels, campgrounds, or trailer parks; or (d) using vehicles for overnight shelter.

According to The National Coalition for the Homeless (2014), the most rapidly growing group of persons who are identified as homeless are families with children, comprising of roughly 40% of the homeless population. Regardless of the criteria used to identify homeless students, The McKinney-Vento Act allows provisions for all homeless youth in schools.

**Factors Contributing to Students' Homelessness**

Unaccompanied homeless high school students tend to have ended up homeless, rather than been born into homelessness. Although there may be a variety of causal factors, the most prevalent factors resulting in homelessness for adolescents include domestic violence, natural disasters, and economic hardships. The National Coalition for the Homeless (2014) indicates that 94% of homeless families are head by single mothers, and over 50% of those families are homeless as a result of domestic violence, family dysfunction, parental conflict, and physical and/or emotional abuse and neglect. As previously mentioned, students are hesitant to disclose issues that contributed their residency instability, therefore making it difficult to determine residency status.

Students' residency status may be transformed due to natural disasters, as well. For example, in August of 2008, Hurricane Ike struck Galveston, along the Gulf Coast, resulting in tens of thousands of people being displaced from their homes. Families were taking shelter in churches, makeshift lodging, gymnasiums, motels, travel trailers, and in homes of friends or extended family members. The aftermath of Hurricane Ike left

thousands of homes destroyed, leaving families scrambling to find housing. Several years later, hundreds of families are still living in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) trailers, or with extended families (Gulf Coast Coalition for Homelessness, 2013). Thousands of families fled Galveston during the storm and did not return to the island. Those that did return faced economic hardships due to rebuilding their homes, literally starting over from the ground up.

Economic hardship contributes to the rising statistical rates of homelessness in the United States. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2014) states that the cost of housing is the greatest economic challenge for families with low socioeconomic status. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) reveals that the cost of housing for families at, or below, the poverty line is their greatest burden, with housing costs expunging at least 50% of their income per month. The recent economic recession has worsened the situations for those that are already facing insufficient affordable housing or lack of adequate jobs (Wong et al., 2009). However, homeless students have challenges that reach beyond the financial aspect.

**Challenges Faced by Homeless Students**

Challenges faced by homeless youth include personal challenges outside of school, and academic challenges while in school.

**Personal challenges.** Homeless students are faced with personal challenges including economic hardships, lack of medical care, food insecurity, family factors, psychological distress, to begin with (Berliner, 2009). Additionally, Fowler et al. (2011) reported that homelessness is related to emotional and behavioral problems, along with physical or sexual victimization, criminal activity, and high school dropout. Furthermore,

mental health issues reported among homeless youth include (a) depression, (b) suicidal tendencies, (c) posttraumatic stress, (d) anxiety, and (e) mood disorders (Kidd, 2007). Challenges faced by homeless students are not limited to the aforementioned situations; other challenges related to academics include transportation, inconsistent attendance, and poor nutrition (Buckner et al., 2001; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

Personal challenges faced by unaccompanied, undocumented, homeless youth who cross the United States border from Mexico are exponentially more challenging. Besides the aforementioned challenges, they also face possible danger along their passage including physical and sexual attacks by gangs along the border, hunger, exposure to the elements, fatigue, personal injuries, and possible death (Holmes, 2010).

**Academic challenges.** Adverse experiences during early childhood may threaten brain development, cognitive learning, and physical health (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Besides the personal and physical challenges of homelessness, students must meet school attendance requirements for graduation, which may also lead to further challenges. The mere fact that they do not have stable residences may make it difficult for them to get to school. Homeless students must find a way to school, whether by walking, riding a bike, riding with a friend, taking the city bus, school bus, or other form of transportation. School districts that require proof of residency also add an additional barrier for homeless students who do not have any means of proof of residency. They may be unaware that the McKinney-Vento Act protects them from this type of discrimination. The schools cannot deny enrollment based on a student's lack of proof of residency. Residency instability disrupts children's schooling, which may cause destabilization of academic achievement (National Research Council, 2010). Researchers have noted a discrepancy in academic

achievement from different socioeconomic status. It has been documented that students living in poverty underperform academically compared to students from a higher socioeconomic status (McLoyd, 1998; Sirin, 2005; Murphy & Tobin, 2011), thus contributing to the dropout rate. They are also at risk for developmental delays, grade repetition, and learning disabilities (Holgersson-Shorter, 2010). As aforementioned, students from lower socioeconomic status traditionally have lower academic achievements, and homeless students often fare even lower (Obradović, et al., 2009). Supporting this inference, researchers reported homeless students scored significantly lower than normally housed students (Buckner, 2008; Hendricks & Barkley, 2011, & Obradović, et al., 2009). Furthermore, developmental delays for homeless students are at a rate of four times that of their peers (Holgersson-Shorter, 2010). Although dropout rates are high, some homeless students beat the odds and achieve academic excellence, despite their homeless situations.

## Theoretical Framework

The basis for the literature review is based on the following conceptual theoretical framework; (a) self-efficacy theory, and b) self-determination theory. The two theories, combined, are the foundation for my study.

**Self-effacy theory.** The self-efficacy theory is derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977, 1986, & 1989). Bandura's description of self-efficacy encompasses the concepts behind the theory.

The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness determines whether they will even try to cope with difficult situations. People fear and avoid threatening situations they believe themselves unable to handle, whereas they behave

affirmatively when they judge themselves capable of handling situations that would otherwise intimidate them. Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. Those who persist in performing activities that are subjectively threatening, but relatively safe objectively, will gain corrective experiences that further reinforce their sense of efficacy thereby eventually eliminating their fears and defensive behavior (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura (1977) hypothesized that the determining factor of coping behaviors is the expectation of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) also affirmed that self-efficacy was the foundation for the length of substantiation of behavior in the face of obstacles and unpleasant experiences. Unaccompanied homeless students' perceived self-efficacy might very well be the foundation of their resilience in the face of adversity. Students who thrive academically exhibit resilient characteristics that kindle their self-determination to succeed. Resilience, intrinsic motivation, and self-determination are key characteristics of the foundation for which much of the literature is derived.

**Self-determination theory.** The self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro-theory of human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1975). According to research conducted on SDT, various factors can either "facilitate self-motivation and well-being, or thwart initiative and positive experience across diverse settings, domains, and cultures" (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 9). Additionally, the theory "assumes that people are active organisms with inherent and deeply evolved tendencies toward psychological growth and development. Clearly evident in the phenomenon of intrinsic motivation" (Deci, 2009). A study lasting over twenty years revealed "autonomously-motivated students thrive in

educational settings, and students benefit when teachers support their autonomy" (Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999).

Literature concerning motivating factors in homeless students is scant, however, studies have suggested that parents who are autonomous support value, and encourage their children's autonomy (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). In order to survive and thrive, homeless students must have their basic needs, as well as their psychological needs, met. The self-determination theory is based on three essential psychological needs: a) autonomy, b) relatedness, and c) competence. (Desi & Ryan, 2009). Most high school students have a caring adult, whether a parent or relative, to help meet their basic and psychological needs. However, for homeless students to achieve these needs, they must possess a form of self-determination and self-motivation. Without parents in the picture, homeless students must have something that keeps them internally motivated.

**Motivation**

According to Ryan & Deci (2000), Motivation is comprised of energy, direction, persistence, activation, and intention and is at the core of biological, cognitive, and social regulation. There are two types of motivation; extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. "Motivation for a specific behavior is regulated by either internal choice or external force." (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Higher levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation increase if autonomy is supported (Young, Johnson, Hawthorne, & Pugh, 2011). I will explore each type of motivation as it relates to my study.

**Extrinsic motivation.** Extrinsic, or external motivation, involves an outside force, driving one to excel for the purpose of receiving something in return for his or her

accomplishment. For some students, extrinsic motivation factors may include grades, praise, or other external rewards. Deci & Ryan (2002, p. 195) postulated that "motivation arises from and is dependent on the presence of environmental events such as rewards, pressures, and constraints." Regarding extrinsic motivation in the educational setting, students will perform a task, such as studying or reading, to achieve a good grade. Self-determined engagement is the foundation for extrinsic motivation and internalization (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

**Intrinsic motivation.** Internal motivation involves an internal drive, which allows an individual to excel for the purpose of personal satisfaction. He or she realizes the personal goals accomplished are a result of his or her own actions, known as intrinsic motivation. The results of this study will reveal what type of motivating factors encourage homeless students to achieve academic resilience and pursue a college degree. Deci & ryan (2002, p. 13) theorized that "intrinsic motivation is integrally connected to the needs for competence and autonomy, and aspects of the social context which influence perceptions of competence and autonomy do indeed affect intrinsic motivation."

**Individual Resiliencies**

Researchers discovered resiliency processes, and narrowed them down to six categories of individual resiliencies including; a) insight, b) independence, c) relationships, d) initiative, e) morality, and f) courage (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Siligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; and Wolin & Wolin, 1993). A discussion of each category of individual resiliency factor will follow, based upon the researchers'

understanding, regarding the results of 25 case studies (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Siligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000: and Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

**Insight.** Insight is the resiliency factor that allows children to overcome personal, social, and academic concerns (Hechtman, 1991). Furthermore, Bass (2007) indicates that insight is a vital factor for homeless students, to acquire personal knowledge and understanding. Finally, Perusse, Goodenough, Donegan, & Jones (2004) identified insight as a critical resiliency factor for high school students to identify obstacles and challenges.

**Independence.** Wolin & Wolin (1993) found independence to be a critical resiliency factor. These researchers found that students with the independent resiliency factor had the ability to maintain psychological and physical distance from negative influences.

**Relationships.** As a resiliency factor, relationships allow individuals to have a link with others, involving compassion, and fulfilling needs of both parties (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). Subsequently, relationships may foster resilience, especially in low-income, high-stress environments (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984), resulting in high-risk students remaining in school, versus dropping out.

**Initiative.** Initiative allows individuals to act on their own behalf. Giving the individual control of a situation, the initiative resiliency factor offers the sense that one can overcome challenges and obstacles (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). As pointed out by Ryan & Deci (2000), initiative can be highly influenced by close familial relationships, which may be lacking in homeless students.

**Morality.** Morality is the understanding and belief of what behaviors are right, and what behaviors are wrong. Researchers noted that the morality resiliency factor include behaviors that comprise the desire for other individuals to have a favorable life (Smith & Prior, 1995). Several characteristics of the morality resiliency factor include altruism, control, and emotional self-monitoring (Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987). Additionally, individuals with the morality resiliency factor display characteristics involving community service and advocacy (Bass, 2007), which closely aligns with altruism.

**Courage.** Courage, the sixth individual resiliency, includes bravery in the face of adversity or challenges (Maddi, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Not a single act, yet a consistent characteristic that allows an individual act in a way that will produce a positive outcome when overcoming obstacles. As pointed out by Brockenleg and Bockern (2003), many of the resiliency factors are included within courage, such as independence, relationships, initiative, and morality. These six individual resiliency factors may be the foundation of academic achievements among homeless students.

**Resilience**

Resilience can be identified in homeless students by achieving graduation. Resilience is described as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990, p. 426). Yet another definition is "a psychological process developed in response to intense life stressors that facilitates healthy functioning" (Johnson, et al., 2009). Although resilience has varied definitions, it basically has the same underlying meaning; thriving in the face of adversity. Einspar (2011) noted that there are components that seem to promote resilience in homeless students, such as forming meaningful relationships,

creating a caring environment, creating a sense of belonging, developing community involvement in school, and developing positive family relationships. There are various intensities to resilience, which are situational, and might depend on the individual resiliencies. Whatever the intensities, homeless students that reach academic excellence, and continue onto college, demonstrate academic resilience.

Researchers have recently studied resilience in homeless students and learned that students reflecting resilience often have resources or protective factors in their lives (Masten et al., 2014). Some of the protective factors include involved and supportive parents, self- control, and advanced cognitive skills (Masten et al., 2014). A close relationship with an adult is an important factor for homeless students in regards to resilience (Kidd & Shahar, 2008). Whatever they may be, the motivating factors that drive them to succeed are the substance for this study, which leads to the theoretical framework for which this study is based.

**Academic Achievement**

Besides the previously mentioned challenges, homeless students are at risk for developmental delays, grade repetition, and learning disabilities (Holgersson-Shorter, 2010). Repeating grades may result in low self-esteem and lack of interest. In many studies, poor academic achievement has been recorded for homeless and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). The rate of developmental delays for homeless students is four times that of their peers (Holgersson-Shorter, 2010). Students from lower socioeconomic status traditionally have lower academic achievements, and homeless students often have even lower scores (Obradović et al., 2009). Results of studies demonstrate homeless students scored significantly lower than

normally housed students (Buckner, 2008; Obradović et al., 2009; Hendricks & Barkley, 2011). These studies indicate that homeless students traditionally have exponentially lower scores than the students that have fixed housing, but come from a lower socioeconomic status. Homeless and highly mobile high school students face higher risk for failure in school than students from low-income, but residentially stable families (Obradović et al., 2009). Taking these issues into consideration, homeless students who thrive personally and academically have overcome the odds against them.

**Academic Resilience**

Although studies reveal that homeless students are more likely to have academic difficulties, many homeless students thrive in the face of adversity and are found to be highly intelligent, independent, and socially acculturated (Obradović et al., 2009; Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2009). Students that achieve academic excellence after exposition to adverse circumstances exemplify academic resilience (Martin & Marsh, 2009; Morales & Trotman, 2004). These particular students appear to have an intrinsic locus of control and motivational characteristics that contribute to their academic success (Miller, 2011). Valiente et al., (2011) noted that motivation for learning is positively related to achievement. These students epitomize *academic resilience,* the ability to successfully thrive personally and academically in the face of adverse situations. Additionally, homeless students are more likely to have high school mobility (moving from one school to another), exacerbating their academic concerns (Tierney et al, 2008; Buckner, 2013).

**Summary**

Homelessness is a universal societal issue. Although the exact number is impossible to determine, in the United States, alone, there are nearly three million reported homeless. Included in those numbers are an alarming percentage of homeless families with children. Of those families, 84% are head by single mothers, and 50% of those are the result of domestic violence (National Coalition to End Homelessness, 2014). Homeless children are not always in a family, however. Many children are living with friends, extended family, or other circumstances, rendering them homeless.

The definition of homeless is not definitive, with many variations, depending on which source from which referring, and for what purpose the definition is intended. For the intended purpose of this study, the definition allowed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will be established. The TEA definition includes students who are: (a) living in home or apartment, in Section 8 housing, or in military housing with parent(s), legal guardian(s), or caregiver(s) with no electricity and/or running water; (b) in the home of a friend or relative because loss of housing, (c) in a shelter due to lack of permanent housing, (d) in transitional housing, (e) in a hotel or motel, (f) in a tent, car, van, abandoned building, on the streets, at a campground, in the park, or other unsheltered location; therefore including every student that may need services. Unaccompanied youth, including those that cross the borders of the United States illegally, are also included within the definition of TEA standards. The same is true for children of migratory workers, even if they are undocumented residents (Texas Education Agency, 2014).

The challenges of homeless youth are unimaginable, including poor nutrition/food insecurity and lack of proper medical care. Additionally, the possibility of academic failure, mental and/or sexual abuse, domestic violence, psychological distress, and criminal activity have been reported in many cases. Unaccompanied homeless students who overcome adversity to achieve academic success are academic resilient. The paucity of research on this topic lends way to further exploration and studies of these students.

**CHAPTER III**

**Methodology**

The purpose of my research was to explore the lived experiences and reflective

perspectives of academic resilient college students who were identified as homeless while

in high school, and to understand the motivating factors contributing to their academic

resilience. In this chapter, I describe the methodology of my qualitative study. The

components of this chapter are: a) research design, b) participants, c) legitimation,

d) instrumentation, e) data collection, f) data analysis, and g) summary of the chapter.

**Research Design**

Qualitative research is much more yielding to the participants' point of view than

quantitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Creswell (2012) ascertains that

phenomenological research allows the researcher to understand a lived experience, or

phenomenon (in this case, homeless students who achieve academic resilience) at a

deeper level. According to Patton (2002), phenomenological research requires thoroughly

capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon; how they perceive

it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with

others. Van Kaam (1959) discussed the relevance of shared human experiences and

explained how sharing experiences gives individuals a sense of feeling understood.

Specifically, Van Kaam postulated that researchers are to focus on understanding how

their participants perceive and make meaning of lived experiences or phenomenon.

Creswell (2012) offered that a phenomenological research study was designed to capture

the perceptions of participants by giving voice to their experiences.

Using Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological analysis, I followed the 7-step existential approach. The steps will be discussed in detail in the analysis phase. A phenomenological research design was used with former homeless high school students who achieved academic resilience to capture the essence of the participants' experience (Mayan, 2001). Qualitative research allows the researcher to act as the instrument of data collection (Creswell, 2012).

**Participants**

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at Sam Houston State University, participants were solicited through purposeful sampling, with six students as the focus of the study. According to Creswell (2012), a phenomenological study has a minimal sample size suggestion of less than ten to develop rich results. Purposeful sampling allows for only those who fit the phenomenological study to participate (Creswell, 2012). All participants had firsthand experience of being identified as homeless while in high school, and have epitomized academic resilience by achieving academic excellence and attending college, thus offering rich data on the subject.

As a high school counselor, I have extensive interactions with high school students. The participants were selected from former students from my high school who were identified as homeless while attending high school. I learned of the participants' homeless status while assisting them with their free application for federal student aid (FAFSA). I was unaware at the time whether or not anyone else knew of his or her homeless status. I sought special approval from the IRB board, and contacted twelve former homeless high school students, and of the twelve, six volunteered to be in my

study. The other six were either attending a university out of state, or were unable to travel back to participate in an interview and sandtray session.

Participants were currently attending in-state universities, and were formerly identified as homeless youth, as defined by The McKinney-Vento Act, while attending high school. Participants who demonstrated academic resilience (achieving high academic standards despite their adversities), and continued their educational goals while attending college were the focus of this study. Due to the nature of confidentiality of homeless students, I did not use high school students, but rather former students who had already graduated and who were out of the public independent school district's influence. Additionally, some of the participants would not have been available due to lack of parental permission; therefore they were all over the age of 18 for purposes of this study. Selected participants varied from undergraduate to graduate students.

Once the former homeless students were identified, by purposeful sampling, criteria of the students were examined. Students meeting the criteria of my study were selected for possible participation. Participants signed a consent, which consisted of the nature and purpose of the study. Participants were then informed that they would remain anonymous by selecting a pseudonym, and that they could have dropped out of the research study at any time. The interviews took place in my secure, private counseling office for optimal results. Additionally, pseudonyms were selected by each participant to assure anonymity throughout the study.

## Legitimation

Because the homeless population is protected, in the sense that homeless students' records were not coded as such, it was necessary to consult with experts in the field,

including the school district's social worker, homeless liaison, and a doctoral mental health director; for verification of the participants' homelessness and personal knowledge of participants' living conditions. The consultation of experts who worked with the homeless students daily provided legitimation to this qualitative study.

**Instrumentation**

In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is as instrument of data collection (Creswell, 2012). In this effort I, along with my coding team, gathered words or themes from a semi-structured interview and a processed sandtray, then analyzed the data to reveal meaning of the participants in descriptive language (Creswell, 2012). I made reflective responses during the semi-structured interview and ask the participants for clarification to provide accurate information. Qualitative research, in contrast to quantitative, is much more yielding to the client's point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

**Data Collection**

The setting for this study was a small, private office, which protected the identity of the participants, and provided a quiet, safe environment for participants' comfort. I began the session with a 9-question, semi-structured interview and made reflective responses throughout. After a brief break, I explained the sandtray process to the participants. The sandtray materials consisted of a blue 18x18 inch tray, white sand, with the tray placed upon a small table so the participants could have full access to the sandtray from all angles. The sandtray was set up in advance, with the same miniatures available in full view for each participant. The sandtray process was also conducted in a quiet, private setting to secure participants' identities. A video recorder was in the room,

to capture spoken words of the participants while the tray was processed, as well as movements (voluntary or involuntary). Participants' faces were not visible in the video, and participants were instructed as to the destruction of the videotapes after the content was extracted for intended purposes. Participants used their pseudonym during the sandtray process, which was used throughout the entirety of the study to enhance confidentiality.

Participants were asked to create a microcosm of their homeless experiences in the sandtray, using the miniatures provided, with the prompt of "please create a scene of your world as a homeless student and the motivating factors that contributed to academic resilience." Each participant was given the choice of the same miniatures, which were separated by categories. After he or she created a scene, he or she gave the sandtray a title to depict his or her meaning of the sandtray scene. Sandtrays were then processed with each participant during the session and pictures of each sandtray were taken and used for data analysis by my coding team.

Tapes of the research participants' semi-structured interviews and sandtray sessions were transcribed verbatim for data analysis. Additionally, each sandtray was photographed from various angles for optimal coding, whereas my coding team extracted themes from the photos. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, I, along with two doctoral students from the counseling department at Sam Houston State University with experience in qualitative research, analyzed the data from my study. The three of us comprised my coding team. The transcripts were read carefully to get a general sense of the overall participants' experiences.

**Data Analysis.** First, my coding team practiced bracketing, in which we described any personal experience with the phenomenon that is being studied. Doing so set aside personal experiences (attempting to eliminate researcher bias) so the focus was directed on the participants. The second step was developing a list of significant statements made by the participants; each statement having equal value. After listing the statements (horizonalization of the data), my coding team worked to create a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements (Moustakas, 1994) from the interview and sandtray transcripts, where themes emerged from the significant statements. Additionally, we analyzed the sandtray photos to determine additional themes or patterns that may have transpired from participants' microcosms.

The third step was taking the significant statements and grouping them into larger components of information, called meaning units, or themes (Moustakas, 1994). Writing a description of *what* the participants experienced, textural description, was utilized in the sequence, including verbatim responses by the participants. Next, I wrote a description of *how* the experience happened, structural description; in this study, *how the homeless students achieved academic resilience* was reported. Finally, the *motivating factors resulting in academic resilience* was discussed.

This description followed the participants' experiences of being homeless, overcoming adversities, and achieving academic resilience. Reflection of settings and context of the phenomenon was described (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, I wrote a "composite description of the phenomenon, incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions." (Moustakas, 1994). The final description is the *essence* of the experience, characterizing the concluding aspect of a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994).

**Summary**

In this chapter, I described the purpose of my phenomenological research to explore the motivating factors of academically resilient, college students who were identified as homeless while in high school. The selection of participants was presented, and I further discussed the methodology and design of my research. Finally, the methods of data analysis were discussed. The results of the research will be introduced in Chapter IV.

**CHAPTER IV**

**Qualitative Results**

In my phenomenological study, I concentrated on the motivating factors contributing to academic resilience of college students who were identified as unaccompanied homeless youth while in high school. Phenomenology allows participants' voices to be heard, to share the experiences they endured during the phenomenon (Moustakas, 2012); in this case, achieving academic resilience while also living a life of homelessness. A phenomenological study relies upon data collected from participants who experienced the phenomenon, and it is recommended to interview between five and twenty-five individuals for the study (Creswell, 2012). Data collection may be derived from many forms including interviews, journals, observations, art, poetry, music, and in the case of my study, sandtray therapy. The components of this chapter include (a) participants, (b) demographic information, (c) interviews, (d) sandtrays, (e) themes, and (f) summary of my research.

**Participants**

My study consisted of participants who have experienced the phenomenon of being identified as unaccompanied homeless youth while in high school, and they were currently college students. As a high school counselor, I have personal contact with every senior before they graduation from high school. Being transparent in my study, many students disclose their personal situations while we are in session. Therefore, I was aware of many former high school students who were homeless while in high school, and since graduated and gone off to college. I used purposeful sampling, resulting in six voluntary participants. The sample consisted of four females and two males. Because all of the

participants were college students, I was required to schedule interviews and sandtray sessions around their educational schedules, adding weekends to the study. Below is a brief profile of each participant. Pseudonyms were used for confidentiality.

**Participant 1.** Michelle is a 22-year-old Caucasian female who was currently attending a state university in southern Texas, pursuing a master's degree in counseling. She claims to have been homeless for most of her life, beginning at a young age; around eight, to the best of her knowledge. Her mother was a drug addict, and she and her brother were removed from their home by CPS on numerous occasions. Due to treatment she received in foster homes, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, she ran away when she was 11. She stayed in a vacant house for two weeks until a neighbor called police and she was placed in another foster home. She and her brother remained homeless for the rest of their school years, and due to placement in various homes, they lost contact for several years. Michelle was eager to participate in this research and hoped that she might encourage other foster children to pursue a postsecondary education.

**Participant 2.** Leslie was an 18-year-old Hispanic female. Although her mother is a Mexican citizen, Leslie was born in Houston, therefore she was an American citizen. Leslie lived with her mother in Mexico until the age of 15, whereas she asked if she could go to the United States to pursue a better education. Reluctantly, her mother agreed by allowing Leslie to join her sister, who came to the United States one year earlier. Leslie resided with her sister, just the two of them, alone in a garage during her high school years. The garage was owned by an elderly woman who let them live there if they paid monthly rent. The garage was turned into a makeshift home, with small electrical appliances and little furniture. Leslie and her sister worked at a candy factory in town to

help pay for rent. Leslie was currently a state university in central Texas, pursuing a degree in criminal justice, with the dream of continuing her education and joining the central intelligence agency (CIA).

**Participant 3.** Nellie is Leslie's older sister. Like Leslie, Nellie was also born in Houston. She is a 20-year-old Hispanic female who came to the United States before Leslie and planned on living with her mother's sister. The arrangement only lasted about two months. Her aunt reportedly stole Nellie's social security number and used it in an illegal manner. When Nellie discovered that her aunt was conducting illegal activity using her social security number, an argument ensued and Nellie was kicked out of her aunt's home. She saw a *for rent* sign, referring to the garage, on her way to school and asked the elderly lady if she could rent it. She worked at a candy factory in town to cover her rent, and used the city bus to get to and from work and school. Her sister, Leslie came to stay with her the following year and they both attended high school together. At the time of the study Nellie was attending a state university in west Texas pursuing a degree in biochemistry.

**Participant 4.** Joanna was a 21-year-old Hispanic female pursuing a bachelors of science degree in biology at a state university in south Texas. Ultimately, Joanna would like to apply for medical school to become a pediatrician. Joanna and her mother lived in a small two-bedroom home from the time Joanna was in kindergarten until the fall of 2008, which was the year that Hurricane Ike destroyed their home. Joanna's mother worked in a local hotel cleaning rooms and barely made enough money to pay bills. They had to depend on the federal emergency management agency (FEMA) to help them rebuild, but they were told it would take months due to the amount of damage from the

storm. Joanna's mother used their entire savings to hire a local contractor to repair the roof of their home. They planned on trying to repair the inside a little at a time. The contractor stole their money and never returned to repair the roof. It was at that time that Joanna and her mother were given a FEMA trailer, which is about the size of a boxcar of a train, to live in until their house was repaired. Joanna and her mother lived in the FEMA trailer throughout the next seven years, and when Joanna graduated from high school, she left for a college dorm.

**Participant 5.** Bobby was a 21-year-old Caucasian male. He lived with his father and his father's girlfriend, in what one might consider an affluent neighborhood. In his sophomore year of high school, Bobby *came out* to his father that he was gay. His father's reaction resulted in Bobby being kicked out of his home. His father completely cut Bobby off from all communication and financial support. He told Bobby to go live with his grandmother, which Bobby did, but that arrangement was not conducive to Bobby's education. Bobby's grandmother lived in a modest home, and Bobby was allowed to live in the basement. Although he had a room, Bobby's grandmother was unable to drive him to school, and her home was out of district. So Bobby ended up staying with friends, sleeping on couches and floors (on bedding). He lived with friends until he graduated from high school. He was accepted to a private university in Texas, where he is pursuing a degree in English with a teaching certification. He plans to teach high school English.

**Participant 6.** Alberto was a 22-year-old Hispanic male. Like Joanna, his home was destroyed by Hurricane Ike in 2008. He lived with his parents and three siblings. The family owned a small Mexican restaurant and Alberto helped them run it. His family was

forced to move in with his grandparents because they were renting their home, and it was inhabitable after the storm. His grandparents lived in a small two-bedroom home, and the arrival of six people made the living arrangements very difficult. His family was considered to be *doubled up*, which falls under the umbrella of homelessness under the McKinney Vento Act. Alberto was currently attending a private university in central Texas seeking a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. He plans to continue his studies in medical school to become a surgeon.

**Demographic Information**

The six participants fit the criteria set forth in my study; each were identified as unaccompanied homeless youth while in high school, they were all attending college, and were at least 18 years of age at the time of this study. It's important to note that participants Nellie and Leslie are sisters.

Prior to the interview and sandtray session, the participants completed a demographic questionnaire. Next, they each participated in a semi-structured interview, which is suggested for a phenomenological research study (Moustakas, 2012). The interview questions were designed to reflect the participants' experiences as a homeless student while in high school. Finally, using reflective perspective, each of the participants created a microcosm in a sandtray of his or her experience as homeless youth while in high school, including his or her motivating factors to achieve academic excellence and pursue a higher education.

Table 1 denotes the descriptive demographics of my participants, including their sex, pseudonym (which was selected by each participant), ethnicity, and age. Sixty percent of the participants were Hispanic, while forty percent were Caucasian. Sexes

consisted of four females and two males, with their current ages ranging from 18 to 22. For the remainder of the research, I will refer to each participant by the pseudonyms that they chose to ensure anonymity.

Table 1

*Demographics of Participants*

| Participant | Sex | Pseudonym | Ethnicity | Age |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | F | Michelle | Caucasian | 22 |
| 2 | F | Leslie | Hispanic | 18 |
| 3 | F | Nellie | Hispanic | 20 |
| 4 | F | Joanna | Hispanic | 21 |
| 5 | M | Bobby | Caucasian | 21 |
| 6 | M | Alberto | Hispanic | 22 |

The demographic questionnaire given to the participants included questions regarding their ages during their homelessness status, grades during homelessness, familial status, and education level of parents (if known). Table 2, below, reveals more in-depth information regarding the participants' families. Michelle mentioned having an older brother, Leslie and Nellie are sisters and only depended on each other during their times as homeless high school students. Joanna only has a mother, Bobby was alone (but stressed the importance of friends during his homeless status), and finally Alberto's entire family was considered homeless. The ages in which the participants indicated homelessness ranged from ages 12 to 18, with 18 being the age that they each graduated from high school, and which was the highest grade indicated within the study. The grades

in which the participants indicated homelessness ranged from grade five through grade twelve, spanning from three to seven years of homelessness.

Table 2

*Participants' family, ages, and grades of homelessness*

| Pseudonym | Family | Ages | Grades |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Michelle | Brother | 10-18 | 5th-12th |
| Leslie | Sister | 15-18 | 10th-12th |
| Nellie | Sister | 16-18 | 11th-12th |
| Joanna | Mother | 12-18 | 7th-12th |
| Bobby | None | 16-18 | 10th-12th |
| Alberto | family | 13-18 | 8th-12th |

Table 3 reveals the participants' responses in reference to the educational level achieved by the participants' parents. Michelle, Leslie, Nellie, and Joanna each maintained that their mother had a middle school education. Additionally, the same four participants exclaimed that they did not grow up with their fathers, therefore the educational level of their fathers were unknown. Alberto revealed that his mother had a high school education, while his father only completed middle school. As he completed the demographic questionnaire, he mentioned his parents' occupations reflected their level of education. He also exclaimed that this was one reason that he wanted a college education. He did not want to continue to work in a family restaurant, or to work in a manual labor field for the rest of his life. He mentioned that he wanted a *real job,* with benefits and steady income. Finally, Bobby revealed that his mother had some college, but did not graduate, and his father had a college degree.

Table 3

*Participants' parents' education level*

| Pseudonym | Mother's Education | Father's Education |
|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| *Michelle* | Middle school | Unknown |
| *Leslie* | Middle school | Unknown |
| *Nellie* | Middle school | Unknown |
| *Joanna* | Middle school | Unknown |
| *Bobby* | Some college | College |
| *Alberto* | High school | Middle school |

Included were the degrees each of the participants were seeking at the time of the study and their course of study. Table 4 depicts the responses from my participants. Michelle is in a graduate program for counseling, with a licensed professional counselor (LPC) track. She plans on becoming a licensed professional counselor after years of experience, and opening a private practice. Leslie is seeking a Bachelor of Science degree in criminal justice and plans to continue her education in the field of criminal justice, and gaining experience and has expectations of joining the central intelligence agency (CIA). Nellie is seeking a Bachelor of Science degree in biochemistry (with the intention of applying for medical school), Joanna is seeking a bachelor of science degree in biology, and planning to apply to medical school to become a pediatrician. Bobby is seeking a bachelor of science degree in English with a teaching certification, while Alberto is seeking a bachelor of science degree in biochemistry, also with the intention of applying to medical school. He plans on becoming a surgeon.

Table 4

*Participants' educational goals*

| Participant | Pseudonym | Degree seeking | University |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | *Michelle* | MS Counseling | University of Houston |
| 2 | *Leslie* | BS Criminal Justice | Sam Houston State University |
| 3 | *Nellie* | BS Biochemistry | University of Texas |
| 4 | *Joanna* | BS Biology | Texas A&M University |
| 5 | *Bobby* | BS English/Teaching | Baylor University |
| 6 | *Alberto* | BS Biochemistry | St. Edwards University |

**Interviews**

After the participants completed the demographic questionnaire, each participated in a semi-structured interview, which is suggested for a phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Regarding the participants' state of homelessness and the motivating factors that ultimately resulted in academic resilience, the following semi-structured interview questions were asked:

1. What circumstances led to your state of homelessness?

2. During which year(s) of school were you considered homeless?

3. Who, in the school setting, discovered your homeless situation?

4. How did he or she become aware of your situation?

5. Please describe your experience as a homeless student during high school: sleeping arrangements, meals, etc.,

6. Were there any significant people that helped you through your homeless year(s)?

7. What resources did you use to help get through high school, and ultimately, accepted into college?

8. What were the motivating factors that drove you to graduate and apply to college?

9. Is there anything else you would like for me to know about your experience as a homeless high school student?

The participants were aware that the interviews were being audiotaped for transcription. Each participant was also informed that nothing on the tape would reveal his or her identity, and that the tapes would be destroyed after transcription.

**Sandtrays**

After the interview, each participant was asked to create in the sandtray a microcosm of their world as a homeless student and the motivating factors that contributed to academic resilience. Each participant was given the same miniatures from which to select. The miniatures were arranged in subcategories, as depicted in Figure 1.

(a) People; various ages, races, occupations, historical figures, folklore figures and sexes.

(b) Nature; trees, shells, rocks, flowers, and sticks

(c) Animals, sea life, wild animals, and domestic animals

(d) Religious/spiritual; a star of David, bible, a cross, and biblical figures

(e) Transportation; cars, truck, boat, airplane, and a bicycle

(f) Fantasy/folklore; dragons, unicorn, witch, Pegasus, and cartoon figures

(g) Fences/barricades; a fence, boulder, path, and gate

(h) Landscaping; a rainbow, mountain, sun, lake, and globe

(i) Household items; bathtub, bed, table, chairs, lamp, and clock

(j) Miscellaneous items; drug paraphernalia (imitation), wishing well, trash can, tools, boots, swing, stepping stones, path, swing, bird cage, feet, and more.



Figure 1. Selection of miniatures

The participants were asked to select as many, or as few, miniatures as they liked. Each participant used the same setup; a blue 18" x 24" sandtray, white sand, and access to a water bottle, if they chose to use it. See Figure 1. There was no time limit set on the creation of the sandtrays. As the participants completed their trays, they were asked to tell me about it, describing their experiences as a homeless high school student and the motivating factors that lead to each of them graduating high school and being accepted to a university, thus demonstrating academic resilience. Each participant was asked to give a title, or name, to his or her sandtray creation. After receiving permission from the participants, I took pictures of each completed sandtray to be used for coding and reflection. Sandtrays are depicted in figures below.



Figure 2.  Michelle: *Reflections*

Michelle titled hers *Reflections* (Figure 2), while reflecting on her past, but focusing on her future. She selected drug paraphernalia to depict her mother's drug and alcohol addictions. She selected people with no gender or faces. She explained to me that she felt like a nobody, because no one wanted her and her brother. The food in the corner demonstrates her hunger while she was homeless. She included a small fence that separated her past from her future. The footprints depict the poem *Footprints in the Sand*, when she felt like God was carrying her through the rough times. The person looking in the mirror is herself, reflecting on her past and facing her future. The trophy is her goal, which represents her graduation from college and moving on with her life. She indicated that to her, this was her victory and that was her trophy for persevering.



Figure 3.  Leslie: *Sisters Going Places*

Leslie titled her sandtray *Sisters Going Places* (Figure 3). In the lower corner are two young ladies with graduation regalia, depicting herself and her sister. The gumball machine represents the candy factory, where she and her sister worked during high school to support themselves. The rainbow indicates happiness to her. She just liked it. The ribbon in the middle represents the United States. She used it mainly because of the colors. Note that it's between her and her family. The people on the other side are members of her family, still in Mexico.



Figure 4.  Nellie: *Leading the Way*

Nellie's sandtray was quite busy. She is depicted by the blonde, facing forward. She said the young lady behind her was her sister, who is following in her footsteps. The

cross near them symbolizes their faith. The hollowed building on the other side of her

sister represents the garage in which they lived while in high school. She included the bus

because she used the city bus to get around town. The gate was an indication of the

challenges she faced, but she left room on both sides to go around. The typewriter and

building depict a computer and her school. She said they both played a major role in her

life. And finally, the girl in cap and gown is herself in the future, with a clock nearby to

say it's only a matter of time.



Figure 5.  Joanna: *Sad Times*

Joanna used few miniatures for her creation. She titled her sandtray *Sad Times.*

Joanna was the only participant that titled hers in the past. Although the prompt was to

create a scene depicting their life as a homeless student and motivating factors, the other

participants chose to title theirs in a positive tone. Joanna used a half-buried school bus to

depict the FEMA trailer in which she and her mother lived for eight years. The person

leaning against the bus is her mother, and she is crying over the situation. Joanna said her

mother cried every day. The house is shown also half-buried and tilted over. This

represents the damage to her house from Hurricane Ike. The figure in the middle is

Joanna, and she is looking forward to graduating college. The girl in the cap and gown is

also Joanna, in her future.



Figure 6.  Bobby: *Don't Look Back*

   Bobby's sandtray is titled *Don't Look Back.* Bobby didn't take long to set his up,

and he explained it relatively in simple terms. The two people in the back represent his

father and his father's girlfriend. When he was kicked out of his home, this is how he

remembers them, screaming and ranting about his sexuality. Bobby said he never looked

back. He is moving forward with his diploma in hand and left room in the sandtray to

keep going.



Figure 7.  Alberto: *Family*

Finally, Alberto's sandtray is titled *Family*. Alberto wished to depict how his life

looked when they had to move into his grandparents' home. He, along with his parents

and two sisters, moved into his grandparents' home after Hurricane Ike destroyed their

home. After they moved in he said one of his sisters had a baby (but he did not include

the baby in the scene). His grandparents sit in the corner of the tray, quietly watching the

family. But then he explained that they never sat. His grandmother cooked for everyone,

every day, and helped watch the baby while the children were at school. The footprints in the sand had a different meaning than that of Michelle. Alberto explained that he had to keep going to reach his goal (rainbow) and the reward on the other side (money). He said once he makes enough money as a surgeon, he is going to buy his parents a new home.

**Themes**

Following the qualitative research protocol, significant statements were extracted from participants' interview responses, combined with the transcripts from the processed sandtray sessions, and subsequent photos of the processed sandtrays. Qualitative protocol results in significant statements in listed in order of significance, according to participants (Moustakas, 1994). The results of the interviews and sandtray sessions however, appeared to produce them in a different order. Therefore, the table will reflect their responses in sequential order, in alignment with my participants' reflective perspective. Regarding the nine qualitative questions and sandtray sessions, participants answered openly about their experiences. From the interview and sandtray session transcripts and photos, my coding team extrapolated five main themes:

- isolation

- confusion

- faith

- determination

- academic achievement

**Isolation.** The first theme was isolation. Every participant revealed a feeling of being, or feeling, alone during his or her time of homelessness. They expanded as to when, and how, they felt alone. Some were figuratively, whereas others were literally.

The significant statements regarding isolation are itemized in Table 5. Addtionally, the photos of the sandtrays depicted forms of isolation. Leslie's sandtray demonstrates a barrier between she and her family. Joanna's sandtray demonstrated the distance between she and her mother, figuratively. Michelle's sandtray had a fence between her past life and her present life. She also used a blank miniature to depict herself as alone. Bobby's sandtray demonstrated isolated by his back to his father. His sandtray's title *Don't Look Back also* demonstrates leaving his past behind and walking away alone.

Table 5

*Theme: Isolation*

| Participant | Significant Statements |
| --- | --- |
| Michelle | We had to walk home and tend to ourselves.<br>I wasn't allowed to tell anyone.<br>She ran off with one of her boyfriends, or whatever, and left us alone. |
| Leslie | My sister and I were alone every single night. We could only call our mother about once a week. |
| Nellie | I only got to see my mother once during that year.<br>My aunt told me I had to leave. She was wrong, but she was kicking me out. |
| Joanna | I didn't tell anyone at school because my mother was afraid someone would find out she wasn't a U. S. citizen. She was always afraid. I kept our secret. |
| Bobby | He didn't just tell me to leave; he told me I was no longer his son. |
| Alberto | I worked by myself. No one in my family, well my parents, could help me with homework because they never even went to high school. |

**Confusion.** Confusion was a recurring theme with my participants. Statements regarding confusion ranged from figuring out where to live, how to pay rent, who to trust, and how to apply for college. Although the topics regarding confusion vary, they all have

the underlying theme. Their statements depicting confusion are revealed in Table 6,

below. My coding team did not pick up additional support for confusion from the

completed sandtray photos.

Table 6

*Theme: Confusion*

| Participant | Significant Statements |
| --- | --- |
| Michelle | I didn't know who I could trust. I wanted to tell someone, but knew that if someone found out, CPS would take us again. |
| Leslie | We had no idea how we were going to make our payment each month. But we knew we had to find a way. |
| Nellie | I had to figure out how to make this work.<br>We both found a job, but we also wanted to keep our grades up.<br>I had many nights of personal thoughts, trying to figure things out. |
| Joanna | I knew I was smart enough, but I wasn't sure how to apply to college.<br>I didn't know anything about financial aid, either. |
| Bobby | I had no idea where to go.<br>I asked my student council sponsor to help me with the whole graduation thing.<br>I didn't know who to talk to. |

**Faith.** Four of my participants made statements, or included sandtray miniatures

concerning faith or God in their interview or sandtray session. It was a recurring theme

that my coding team pointed out, even though it was not from every participant. In

Nellie's sandtray she used two buildings. One was turned around depict her garage

apartment, while the second was in her future depicting the church that she and her sister

attended. She also included a cross, which is placed near her and her sister, depicting

faith in her life. In Michelle's completed sandtray she used a pair of feet. Michelle

explained that the footprints in the sand reminded her of the poem, *Footprints in the*

*Sand,* in which God carried her through her roughest times.

Table 7

*Theme: Faith*

| Participant | Significant Statements |
| --- | --- |
| Michelle | When I saw the footprints (miniatures), I knew I had to use them. I remember that poem called Footprints in the Sand, and they reminded me that God was carrying me on His shoulders through my toughest times. |
| Leslie | My mother always prayed for us.<br>We found a church here and went all the time.<br>We joined the youth group and made friends through the church. |
| Nellie | Sometimes I worried, but I knew God would protect us.<br>He (God) watched over us.<br>At night, sometimes I was scared, but I knew He (God) would keep us safe. |
| Alberto | My parents never complained; they said to keep faith.<br>We didn't talk about it all the time, but we prayed about it. |

**Determination.** My participants had strong determination factors that were

disclosed during their interviews and sandtray sessions. While some participants revealed

their determination to make it to college, others revealed their determination for

achieving academic excellence, without expecting to be admitted to college, or having the

funds to obtain a college degree. Additionally, participants divulged personal information

about his or her family that helped keep them motivated. The resulting statements

reflecting the theme *determination* are depicted in Table 8 below.

In Nellie's sandtray she used a bridge with a miniature of a graduating student on

the other side, depicting her determination to succeed and graduate from college.

Alberto's sandtray depicted a rainbow with money on the other side. That scenario

demonstrated his determination to be financially stable. The use of a graduating student

in Bobby's sandtray indicated his determination to graduate from college. Michelle's

sandtary had a miniature of a trophy, indicating her determination to achieve excellence.

Table 8

*Theme: Determination*

| Participant | Significant Statements |
| --- | --- |
| Michelle | With everything I had been through, I wanted to make a difference in the lives of other children.<br>I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and I wanted to prove to myself that I was worthy; no one ever told me that before. |
| Leslie | I wanted to make my mother proud.<br>I had to make our separation worth it in the long run.<br>My sister sacrificed so much for me, and I also wanted to make her proud. |
| Nellie | I had to be a good example for my sisters.<br>My mother let me move to another country to pursue my dream; I needed to make her proud of me and prove that she made the right decision. |
| Joanna | My goal was not only to graduate, but also to be the first in my family to go to college.<br>When I graduate from college, I am moving my mother in with me so she won't have to work two jobs anymore.<br>She deserves a break. I don't want to see her cry over money ever again. |
| Bobby | I just wanted to prove my dad wrong.<br>He said I would never amount to anything.<br>I want to encourage other kids to pursue their dreams; that's why I want to be a teacher. |
| Alberto | My mom and dad have always worked manual labor jobs.<br>I want to help them build a new home.<br>When I become a doctor, they will never have to work two jobs again. |

**Academic Achievement**

The final theme that was revealed was achievement. My participants were eager

to share their accomplishments while in high school. The resulting theme of *academic*

*achievement* is depicted below in Table 10. Additionally, four of the six sandtrays had

graduating students within the scenes, indicating academic achievement.

Table 9

*Theme: Academic Achievement*

| Participant | Significant Statements |
| --- | --- |
| Michelle | When I was accepted into the National Honor Society, that was a big deal for me.<br>I was proud of myself, but no one was at my graduation.<br>Once I knew my rank was in the top 10%, it was on! |
| Leslie | When my sister received a full scholarship to college, it made me work that much harder.<br>I actually graduated with a higher rank than she did.<br>I earned national rankings in my Speech and Debate club, too. |
| Nellie | I was accepted into every college that I applied to.<br>I was a finalist for the Quest Bridge scholarship<br>I am now on a full scholarship to University of Texas San Antonio.<br>I am the first in my family to attend college and it's a great feeling. |
| Joanna | I was accepted to Texas A&M, which was a dream come true.<br>My mother cried when I told her I was going to college. |
| Bobby | Becoming a teacher has always been my plan, and I knew I could do it.<br>Baylor University offered me a scholarship for my accomplishments. |
| Alberto | My teachers told me I was smart.<br>I pushed myself to be accepted in to St. Edwards University.<br>I probably could have done better if I didn't have to work in high school.<br>Sometimes the work just came easily to me. I didn't really have to study. |

The participants were contacted after the themes materialized to confirm the

themes, which is deemed member checking. The participants verified that the themes

reflected their perspectives of homelessness while in high school.

**Summary**

This chapter revealed the qualitative results of my phenomenological study of academic resilient students who were identified as homeless while in high school. The information disclosed in the demographic portion of the interviews provided a foundation of the participants.

Qualitative results were divulged using information extrapolated from the consolidation of my participants' interview transcripts, sandtray session transcripts, and sandtray photos to gain a deeper understanding of the motivating factors that contributed to academic resilience of the former homeless high school students. The themes that emerged were (a) isolation, (b) confusion, (c) faith, (d) determination, and (e) academic achievement. After the themes emerged, the participants confirmed the results.

**CHAPTER V**

**Discussion**

In my phenomenological research, I studied the motivational factors resulting in academic resilience of college students who were identified as homeless while in high school. In this chapter, I will provide a summary of the study, along with a discussion of the findings, implications for counselors working with homeless students, limitations, recommendations for further research, and conclusions. My research question was, what are the contributing factors leading to academic resilience of former homeless high school students?

The themes that emerged from this study will be discussed, and information gathered will be synthesized to offer a deeper understanding of factors contributing to academic resilience in homeless students.

**Summary of the Study**

As researchers have noted, the homeless population in the United States is growing at an exponentially alarming rate (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009). Due to the nature of homelessness, it is impossible to determine the exact number; however, it is estimated that more than two million children in the United States are identified as homeless (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2009; Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erden, & Serocivh, 2009), and the number has grown significantly in recent years (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth [NAEHCY]/First Focus, 2010). Among the homeless are over two million children under the age of 18. There are various factors that may lead to homelessness of a child, such as familial domestic violence, parental incarceration, natural disasters, economic hardships,

and illegal immigration (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009; Hennessy-Fiske, 2014).

Homeless high school students tend to have ended up homeless, rather than having been born into homelessness, which was the case for my participants; each of them ended up homeless, rather than being born into the status. Many causal factors come into the equation, however, and the most prevalent factors resulting in homelessness for adolescents include domestic violence, natural disasters, and economic hardships (The National Coalition for the Homeless, 2014). Among homeless families, 94% are headed by single mothers, and over 50% of those families are homeless as a result of domestic violence, family dysfunction, parental conflict, and physical and/or emotional abuse and neglect (The National Coalition for the Homeless, 2014). Adding to the increasing number of homeless youth, there are thousands of unaccompanied adolescents that cross the United States/Mexico border each year. According to Hennessey-Fiske (2104, p. A1), "the number of unaccompanied young migrants nearly doubled in the last three years, overwhelming local shelters and filling local immigration courts". The dangers that young migrants may face during their travels are insurmountable, including physical violence, sexual attacks, hunger, exposure to the elements, and death (Holmes, 2010).

Chapter II, served as the foundation for my phenomenological study, in which specifics concerning homeless adolescents were revealed. The review of the literature introduced major challenges faced by homeless students. Those challenges outlined the resiliency factor that my participants had to overcome to achieve academic excellence, and ultimately, prove to be academically resilient.

I collected demographic information about each participant by using a questionnaire that covered information regarding their; (a) age, (b) sex, (c) ethnicity, (d) family (at time of homelessness), (e) ages in which they were identified as homeless, (f) grades in which they were identified as homeless, (g) parents' education level, (h) degree in which they are seeking, and (i) university in which they are attending. I conducted individual interviews and sandtray sessions (in which photos were taken), with my participants in a private setting. Each participant selected a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. There were nine interview questions regarding their time identified as homeless high school students.

The interviews and sessions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for accuracy. My coding team then extrapolated themes from the transcriptions and photos. Five major themes emerged and were discussed in detail. The resulting themes were as follows; (a) isolation, (b) confusion, (c) faith, (d) determination, and (e) academic achievement. The five emerging themes were aligned with resiliency and motivating factors of academic resilience. The themes will be explored in depth.

**Isolation.** Participants shared common experiences of feeling alone, or isolated from their peers while in high school. Statements extracted from the interviews included Michelle expressing, "We had to walk home and tend to ourselves." "I wasn't allowed to tell anyone." and "She ran off with one of her boyfriends, or whatever, and left us alone." She indicated that she and her brother were often teased for not having clean clothes or clean hair. Because her mother would not allow her to speak of their living conditions, Michelle carried the secret, and shame (her words) with her.

As mentioned earlier, Leslie and Nellie are sisters. Nellie came to the United States first, and then her younger sister followed. As they lived alone in a makeshift garage apartment, isolation set in with them. Leslie exclaimed, "My sister and I were alone every single night. We could only call our mother about once a week." While Nellie claimed, "I only got to see my mother once during the year." And "My aunt told me I had to leave. She was wrong, but she was kicking me out." In both Leslie's and Nellie's sandtray, they had a barrier between them and their mother, who lives in Mexico. Although they live together, they feel isolated from their family. Although Leslie and Nellie are not in the United States as undocumented students, they travelled and lived alone, making their circumstance in alignment with the undocumented students who enter the United States illegally.

Joanna and her mother lived in a FEMA trailer for years after Hurricane Ike destroyed their home. Although Joanna is a U.S. citizen, her mother is not. Her mother feared what would happen if anyone found out. Therefore, Joanna was also not allowed to tell anyone of their living situation. She stated, "I didn't tell anyone at school because my mother was afraid someone would find out she wasn't a U. S. citizen. She was always afraid. I kept our secret."

Bobby had a different experience concerning homelessness. He had a stable home, living with his father. When Bobby told his father he was gay, his father kicked him out and told him to figure it out. Bobby was left to fend for himself, with no financial help from his father. He spent nights at friends' homes, until he graduated from high school. His isolation resonates in his statement, "He didn't just tell me to leave; he told me I was no longer his son." Bobby's situation of living with friends delineates

McKinney-Vento's definition of homeless by living *doubled-up* with friends. Hallett (2012) posits that homeless youth living with friends don't think of themselves as homeless, but rather they adopt their friends' families as their own.

Alberto had, and still has, a loving relationship with his parents. However, he felt isolated because he didn't always share things with them. He stated, "I worked by myself. No one in my family, well my parents, could help me with homework because they never even went to high school." Additionally, Alberto's sandtray had a miniature, depicting him, separated from the rest of his family.

Although isolation was extrapolated as a significant theme, it aligns with a resiliency, independence, rather than a motivating factor. Researchers (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Siligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; and Wolin & Wolin, 1993), found that students with the independent resiliency factor had the ability to maintain psychological and physical distance from negative influences. Homeless students working independently may have done so because their homelessness went unidentified.

As discovered by Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler (2007), many homeless students go unidentified for various reasons such as (a) embarrassment, (b) family secrets, (c) fear, and (d) shame. My participants verbalized some of the same reasons for not being identified sooner than their senior year in high school. Similar to research, my participants remained silent, rather than come forward with their homeless situation.

The paucity of research in the area of homeless students was noted by Stulkowski (2016). Researchers noted that it was likely due to the fact that homeless students tend to be underidentified (Hallett, Low, & Skrla, 2015; Sulkowski & Michael, 2014), supporting earlier research by Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler (2007).

**Confusion.** The statements inferred from my participants' interviews, sandtrays, and photos revealed the following theme of confusion. Statements varied from trying to figure out life, to trying to figure out the college application process. The emerging statements regarding confusion are listed by each participant, in no particular order.

Michelle stated, "I didn't know who I could trust. I wanted to tell someone, but knew that if someone found out, CPS would take us again." She is referring to the many times that she and her brother were placed in foster care. Michelle was confused about where to turn and who to trust.

Leslie and Nellie had similar mistrust issues, because they were both underage, yet living on their own. Nellie exclaimed, "I had to figure out how to make this work. We both found a job, but we also wanted to keep our grades up." And finally, "I had many nights of personal thoughts, trying to figure things out." Leslie, her sister, stated, "We had no idea how we were going to make our payment each month. But we knew we had to find a way." The girls both worked to make the payment, and both graduated with honors.

Bobby exclaimed, "I didn't know where to go. I didn't know who to talk to. I asked my student council sponsor to help me with the whole graduation thing." Bobby also graduated with honors. His father did not come to graduation. Alberto had more of an issue with trying to maneuver through the college application process. He stated, "No one in my family went to college, so they couldn't help me. I had to learn the process on my own; well, with some help from my counselor."

Confusion often goes hand-in-hand with the academic process in which students are expected to navigate; college applications, essays, interviews, applying for financial

aid, university visits, and college housing, and more. Homeless students face additional challenges (Berlinger, 2009; Fowler, et al., 2011; Murphy & Tobin, 2011) because they may be trying to navigate independently. Although my participants expressed confusion concerning the process, each of my participants was able to overcome this obstacle to learn the process of graduation and college acceptance.

The emerging theme of confusion also aligned with a resiliency factor rather than a motivating factor. My participants' state of confusion was followed by their ability to overcome it, exemplifying a resiliency factor.

**Faith.** The next emerging theme was faith. It was significant in at least half of my participants' sandtray scenes. Michelle noted that, "When I saw the footprints (miniatures), I knew I had to use them. I remember that poem called *Footprints in the Sand*, and they reminded me that God was carrying me on His shoulders through my toughest times."

Leslie exclaimed, "My mother always prayed for us. We found a church here and went all the time. We joined the youth group and made friends through the church." Nellie agreed with her sister by stating, " Sometimes I worried, but I knew God would protect us. He watched over us. At night, sometimes I was scared, but I knew He would keep us safe."

Finally, Alberto said, "My parents never complained; they said to keep faith. We didn't talk about it all the time, but we prayed about it." He was referring to not knowing how they were going to pay for college once he was accepted. He applied to prestigious colleges, but he also knew that his family could not afford to pay the high cost of tuition. Alberto received a full scholarship, after all.

Johnson (1999) ascertains that faith is one of the core attributes of the spirit and found in resilient individuals. His research resulted in support of the importance of spiritual health in adolescents (Johnson, 1999). Further research by Oglesby-Pitts (2000) discovered that children of poverty "used a variety of strategies to cope with stressors such as poverty, poor housing, inadequate educational resources: all with profound opportunities to affect success or failure." (p. 2198). Students living in poverty (which includes most homeless students) are more likely to fail. Poverty-stricken students who had an instilled sense of faith tend to become resilient (Oglesby-Pitts, 2000).

**Determination.** The participants in my study demonstrated a determination factor, which was, without equivocation, emergent by their interviews and sandtray sessions. Each of the participants inferred determination. Examples of each will be demonstrated.

Michelle stated, 'With everything I had been through, I wanted to make a difference in the lives of other children." She continued, "I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and I wanted to prove to myself that I was worthy; no one ever told me that before." She was determined to prove to herself that she could graduate and continue on to higher education. Michelle had intrinsic motivation factors of proving to herself that she was worthy. Additionally, her external motivating factor was to help other children that may be in similar situations as to what she faced while growing up. She is now studying at the graduate level.

Leslie explained, "I wanted to make my mother proud. I had to make our separation worth it in the long run. My sister sacrificed so much for me, and I also want

to make her proud." Leslie encompasses internal motivating factors. She only mentioned intrinsic motivating factors, rather than wanting something in return.

Nellie stated, "I had to be a good example for my sisters. My mother let me move to another country to pursue my dream; I needed to make her proud of me and prove that she made the right decision." Nellie, like her sister, wanted to make her mother proud of her. Her motivating factors were intrinsic and personal. She graduated with highest honors from high school and is now an honors student in college.

Joanna said, "My goal was not only to graduate, but also to be the first in my family to go to college. When I graduate from college, I am moving my mother in with me so she won't have to work two jobs anymore. She deserves a break. I don't want to see her cry over money ever again." Joanna exemplified both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. She not only wanted to do something for herself, but she wanted to take care of her mother when she was able to do so.

Bobby exclaimed, "I just wanted to prove my dad wrong. He said I would never amount to anything. I want to encourage other kids to pursue their dreams; that's why I want to be a teacher." Bobby's explanation portrays both intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors. He not only wanted to prove something by going to college, but he wants to encourage other young students to pursue his or her dreams, as well.

Alberto wanted nothing more than to help his family. He responded, "My mom and dad have always worked manual labor jobs. I want to help them build a new home. When I become a doctor, they will never have to work two jobs again." Much like Joanna, Alberto's goal for obtaining his college degree was to help his family. His motivations were spurned by intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

My conceptual and theoretical framework consisting of self-efficacy and self-determination theory was the foundation for my research. The self-efficacy theory, derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977, 1986, & 1989), clearly exemplifies my participants' will to achieve. Bandura stipulates, "The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness determines whether they will even try to cope with difficult situations." He continues, "they behave affirmatively when they judge themselves capable of handling situations that would otherwise intimidate them." Each of my six participants epitomizes the very definition stated by Bandura. Bandura (1977) hypothesized that, the determining factor of coping behaviors is the expectation of self-effacy, and that self-effacy was the foundation for the length of substantiation of behavior in the face of obstacles and unpleasant experiences. The very nature of homelessness is an unpleasant experience, as each participant explained throughout his or her interview and sandtray session.

According to research conducted on the self-determination theory, various factors can either "facilitate self-motivation and well-being, or thwart initiative and positive experience across diverse settings, domains, and cultures" (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 9). The theory additionally "assumes that people are active organisms with inherent and deeply evolved tendencies toward psychological growth and development, clearly evident in the phenomenon of intrinsic motivation." (Deci, 2009).

Deci & Ryan (2000) postulate that "motivation is comprised of energy, direction, persistence, activation, and intention and is at the core of biological, cognitive, and social regulation." Clearly, the participants in my study exude the qualities assumed by Deci and Ryan (2000). The results of my study indicated that each of the participants

demonstrated a determination to succeed, whether by intrinsic or extrinsic motivational factors.

**Academic Achievement.** Academic achievement was the final theme extrapolated from the transcripts and photos. Residency instability disrupts children's schooling, which may cause destabilization of academic achievement (National Research Council, 2010). Despite their residency instability, they exuded resilience and thrived. Furthermore, poor academic achievement has been recorded for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Murphy & Tobin, 2011), thus contributing to the dropout rate. Researchers further stipulate that homeless students scored significantly lower than normally housed students (Buckner, 2008; Hendricks & Barkley, 2011; & Obradovic, et al., 2009).

According to my findings, my participants surpassed the social norm of the expectations of homeless students (McLoyd, 1998; Sirin, 2005; Murphy & Tobin, 2011). They displayed incredible resilience by prevailing over the obstacles, huge obstacles, that they each faced as a homeless student. The individual resiliencies discovered by researchers include (a) insight, (b) independence, (c) relationships, (d) initiative, (e) morality, and (f) courage (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Siligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; and Wolin & Wolin, 1993).

Participants' resiliencies.

The individual resiliencies are instilled within my participants, and each demonstrated individual resiliencies and excelling academically, thus exemplifying academic resilience. The resiliency processes were the foundation that led to my participants' academic resiliencies. The theme and related statements of isolation reveal that my

participants took the initiative to examine what was needed for graduation and college applications.

Bass (2007) indicated that insight is a vital factor for homeless students, to acquire personal knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, my participants formed relationships that would help them navigate the process, therefore fostering the resiliency capacity (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984). Stated as a parallel, many homeless students thrive in the face of adversity and are found to be highly intelligent, independent, and socially acculturated (Obradovic et al., 2009; Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardstee, 2009). Additionally, Valiente et al., (2011), noted that motivation for learning is positively related to achievement.

Insight was also discovered to be vital resiliency components according to Perusse, Goddenough, Donegan, & Jones (2004) in regards to homeless students indentifying obstacles and challenges. My participants indicated the challenge of the college application and admissions process. Each of my six participants was able to overcome the obstacles to gain acceptance in to a university in Texas.

Wolin & Wolin (1993) found students with the independent resiliency factor had the ability to maintain psychological and physical distance from negative influences. The participants in my study exemplified independence by finding a way to live and thrive in the face of adversity. Two of my participants, Nellie and Leslie, actually lived on their own, providing for themselves throughout their last three years of high school.

**Implications**

Motivating factors elicited from my study confirm that homeless students can succeed academically and personally. The themes extracted from the data are sustained

by the conceptual framework constituted by self-efficacy and self-determination theories. The essence of the theories and my participants' responses are parallel with one another, rendering the support of the conceptual framework.

Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1989) self-efficacy theory explains that people behave affirmatively when they judge themselves capable of handling situations that would otherwise intimidate them. Bandura (1977) further hypothesized that the determining factor of coping behaviors is the expectation of self-efficacy. My participants exhibited positive self-efficacy by understanding their potential and working to achieve it.

Because homeless students often go unidentified for reasons aforementioned, they may easily fall through the proverbial cracks and may meet the expectations of the academically underachieving students. The paucity of research in the area of homeless students was noted by Stulkowski (2016). Researchers noted that it was likely due to the fact that homeless students tend to be underidentified (Hallett, Low, & Skrla, 2015; Sulkowski & Michael, 2014), supporting earlier research by Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler (2007).

Therefore, school counselors, school administrators, district homeless liaisons, and teachers will benefit by understanding the implications of situations faced by homeless students. Hallett, et al., (2015) noted that district leadership serves as a bridge between federal policies and local schools. Although The McKinney-Vento Act has specific wording, local school districts have homeless liaisons that determine whether or not a student is identified as homeless. It's vital that the homeless liaison is aware of students' potential homelessness status as soon as possible.

Furthermore, they will also benefit by understanding what motivates homeless students to thrive rather than give up. Understanding what homeless students' challenges are would assist the school district personnel in providing necessary resources for the homeless students. Some of the resources available to homeless students in Texas include Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides a monetary value for food; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which assists families in need who have children under the age of 18; health care, and support services.

Additionally, school counselors can use the results to better understand how to identify homeless students, rather than allow them to struggle through school and figure it out in their senior year, as described by every one of my participants. Understanding their challenges, needs, and motivating factors of homeless student will lay the foundation for more successful outcomes. A factor that came up in several of my participants' interviews was the fact that they did not realize their personal situation fell under the umbrella of the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homeless, therefore they did not understand the importance of notifying someone about their situations. As Bobby stated, "I wasn't really homeless because I had a place to sleep." Nellie and Leslie felt the same way because, "Our garage apartment was our home during school." even though it was not an apartment at all. Alberto's situation was identified as *doubled-up*, which falls under the definition of homeless according to the McKinney-Vento Act. He also did not feel as if his family was homeless, even though they had eight people and two families in a two-bedroom home. Each of my participants would have been offered the aforementioned resources if a school official knew about their situation sooner.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In my phenomenological study, I examined the motivating factors resulting in academic resilience of former homeless high school students, using a conceptual framework of self-efficacy and self-determination theories as the foundation for the study. The literature review was limited on academic achievements of homeless students, but was abundant on literature concerning academic failure of homeless students. Therefore, it is recommended that further qualitative research be conducted on homeless students who are academically resilient to study the conditions in which they achieved such results. The paucity of research limited the literature that was available concerning academic resilience, especially that of homeless students (Stulkowski, 2016).

The assumption of my study included academically resilient homeless students, but it did not cover those that may have gone to college and failed. Only former students who are still in college participated, which limited data. To gain a more in depth understanding of homeless students' academic resilience, a study may be conducted that follows the students through their college experiences.

It is imperative that school officials, including teachers, school counselors, administrators, and district personnel be more efficient in identifying homeless students. In my participants' cases, many of them were deemed homeless after enrolling in school, whereas his or her registration paperwork would not reflect a homeless status. Further research into developing ways of identifying homeless students is warranted.

Furthermore, based on the emerging themes from my study, a qualitative study should be conducted with homeless students currently in high school rather than with former high school students. An in-depth study of homeless high school students may

reveal necessary implications for school officials regarding the needs and identification factors of homeless students.

Finally, a qualitative study should be conducted with school counselors to identify the current process in which they identify homeless students, and by what parameters they are considering a student to be eligible for services. The study should also include whether or not the results of identification are subjective or objective. The themes of my study indicate that some subjectivity went into identifying homeless students. The implications may result in a chance of a homeless student being misclassified, therefore not allowing him or her access to eligible, and available, benefits and resources.

**Conclusion**

My study includes students who were identified as homeless while in high school, yet somehow overcame their challenges and went on to attend college. These particular students exemplified the meaning of academically resilient, by overcoming their challenges and achieving academic excellence.

Although the homeless population faces many challenges, the homeless youth face additional challenges, and poor academic achievement is just one (Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007; Hardy, 2009). Researchers have discovered that poor academic achievement has been recorded for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Murphy & Tobin, 2001), thus contributing to the dropout rate. Homeless students are also at a higher risk for educational and developmental delays ( Hebers, et al., 1997; Poland, 2011; Rafferty et al., 2004). However, my study included participants who overcame the obstacles and thrived in the face of adversity, resulting in academic

resilience. Each participant is now in college and succeeding both personally and academically.

My study was founded on the conceptual framework of self-efficacy theory, derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977, 1986, & 1989) and self-determination theory, which is a macro-theory of human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1975) in alignment with the themes extrapolated from the data. Various themes arose, including (a) isolation, (b) confusion, (c) faith, (d) determination, and (e) academic achievement.

The vast research conducted on homelessness was concerning challenges and low academic achievements among the population. The lack of research concerning high achieving homeless students limited the ability to provide a deeper understanding of the ability of homeless students to thrive academically and personally. This study can provide a clear understanding of the needs of homeless students for school officials. Regardless of how homeless students are identified, it is vital that they are identified. Professional school counselors may be the initial contact for a homeless student, and bringing awareness to school officials on the challenges that homeless students face can help facilitate a plan to better identify, and ultimately, better serve them, which is what professional school counselors strive for.

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Wong, J. H., Elliott, L., Reed, S., Ross, W., McGuirk, P., Tallarita, L., & Chouinard, K. (2009). McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act Subtitle B—Education for homeless children and youths program: Turning good law into effective eEducation: 2008 Update. *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy, 16(1),* 53-115.

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# APPENDIX

| | |
|---|---|
| DATE: | August 16, 2016 |
| TO: | Linda Hart [Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Mary Nichter] |
| FROM: | Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB |
| PROJECT TITLE: | *Motivational factors contributing to academic resilience of former homeless high school students: A phenomenological study [T/D]* |
| PROTOCOL #: | 2016-07-29103 |
| SUBMISSION TYPE: | INITIAL REVIEW—RESPONSE TO MODIFICATIONS |
| ACTION: | APPROVED |
| APPROVAL DATE: | August 16, 2016 |
| EXPIRATION DATE: | August 16, 2017 |
| REVIEW TYPE: | EXPEDITED |
| REVIEW CATEGORIES: | 7 |

Thank you for your submission of your **Response to Modifications** for this project. The Sam Houston State University (SHSU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received **Expedited** Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure which are found on the Application Page to the SHSU IRB website.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

**Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY
*A Member of The Texas State University System*

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
903 Bowers Blvd, Huntsville, TX 77341-2448
Phone: 936.294.4875
Fax: 936.294.3622
irb@shsu.edu
www.shsu.edu/~rgs_www/irb/

appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. **Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of August 16, 2017. When you have completed the project, a Final Report must be submitted to ORSP in order to close the project file.**

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 936-294-4875 or irb@shsu.edu. Please include your project title and protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna Desforges
IRB Chair, PHSC
PHSC-IRB

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Sam Houston State University IRB's records

**Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY
*A Member of The Texas State University System*

**Subject Information Sheet**

My name is Linda M Hart, and I am a doctoral student of the Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study of motivational factors contributing to academic resilience in former homeless high school students. I hope that data from this research will assist school counselors with identifying homeless students and their needs while in school. You have been asked to participate in the research because you have been identified as academically resilient by being accepted into a university, and you were identified as a homeless student while in high school. As your former counselor, I have knowledge of your homeless status while in high school. I will not access personal records for this study.

The research is relatively straightforward, and we do not expect the research to pose any risk to any of the volunteer participants. If you would like to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a brief, semi-structured interview, and you will also be asked to create a scene in sand. Any data obtained from you will only be used for the purpose of assisting school counselors in working with homeless students. Under no circumstances will you, or any other participants who participated in this research, be identified. In addition, your data will remain confidential. This research will require about two hours of your time. Participants will not be paid or otherwise compensated for their participation in this project. Audio tapes will be made of your interview, and photos will be taken of your sandtray. You are able to listen to tapes and view photos. The tapes and photos will be destroyed after the data has been collected. Tapes will be demagnetized and photos will be shredded.

Participation is voluntary. If you decide to not participate in this research, your decision will not affect your future relations with Sam Houston State University. Also, if at any point during the research you decide to withdraw, or do not wish to, participate in the remainder of the research you are free to withdraw your permission and to discontinue participation at any time without affecting that relationship. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me using the contact information below. If you are interested, the results of this study will be available at the conclusion of the project.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Linda M Hart, or my Faculty Sponsor, Dr. Mary Nichter, using our contact information below.

*Linda M Hart*
SHSU Counselor Education Dept.
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX 77341
Phone: (936) 294-4248
E-mail: lmh046@shsu.edu

*Dr. Mary Nichter*
SHSU Counselor Education Dept.
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, TX 77341
Phone: (936) 294-4248
Email: edu_msn@shsu.edu

☐ I understand the above and would like to participate

☐ I do not wish to participate in the current study.

> Should participants wish to be referred for counseling, they will be referred to the Gulf Coast Center; Galveston County Mental Health Clinic, 1-800-643-0967

**A copy of this permission form is available for your records.**

**VITA**

**Linda M. Hart**

**EDUCATION**

**Doctor of Philosophy** (May, 2017)
        Counselor Education & Supervision: CACREP accredited program
        Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX
        Dissertation: Motivating factors contributing to academic resilience of former
        homeless high school students: A phenomenological study.

**Master of Science**
        Counseling w/ LPC track
        University of Houston Clear Lake, Houston, TX
        May 12, 2009

**Bachelor of Science**
        Behavioral Science/Psychology
        University of Houston Clear Lake, Houston, TX
        December 4, 2004

**<u>LICENSURES & CERTIFICATIONS</u>**

**Licensed Professional Counselor #66131**
        Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors

**Licensed Professional Counselor – Supervisor #66131**
        Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors

**Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor Trainer**
        Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors

**National Certified Counselor #282706**
        National Board for Certified Counselors and Affiliates, Inc.

**Certified School Counselor (EC-12)**
        Texas State Board for Educator Certification

**Certified Special Education Teacher (EC-12)**
        Texas State Board for Educator Certification

**CEU Provider for the State of Texas #2342**
        Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Educational Counselor & Consultant**        **Feb. 2014 - present**
*Excel Counseling & Consulting*
> Developed college preparatory program for applications and admissions
> Provide college preparatory direction and support for students and parents
> Collaborate with colleges concerning academics, admissions, financial aid, transfer credits, technical programs, and workforce collaboration.


**Career & Technical Education School Counselor**     **Nov. 2009 - present**
*Galveston Independent School District – Galveston, Texas*
> Provide college preparatory direction and support for students and parents
> Collaborate with colleges and parents concerning academics, admissions, & articulated credits
> Provide support and skill building testing strategies

**Adjunct Professor Counselor Education.**       **May 2012–Dec 2013**
*Sam Houston State University - Huntsville, TX.*
> Counseling Children & Adolescents
> Practicum in Counseling

**Student Teacher Counselor Education.**       **May 2012–Dec 2013**
*Sam Houston State University - Huntsville, TX.*
> Abnormal Behavior

**Test Proctor**
*Amoco Federal Credit Union -Texas City, TX.*     **PRN**
> Proctor examinations for financial counselors

**Special Education Teacher: Department Chair: Sep. 2007 – Nov. 2009**
*Texas City Independent School District – Texas City, Texas*
> Provide academic support for students referred to Special Education
> Co-teach in core classes to provide the least restricted environment

**Academic Advisor: Jan. 2005 – May 2007**
*College of the Mainland – Texas City, Texas*
> Conduct counseling and guidance workshops for incoming freshmen
> Provide academic counseling and degree planning with college students
> Coordinate dual credit courses for high school students

**Director/Owner: Educational Child Care Center: Sep. 1991 – May 2004**
*Texas Department of Regulatory and Protective Services – Texas City, Texas*

**GRANTS**

**From Title 1 College Readiness: March 2013 ($5000)**
*Galveston Independent School District – Galveston, Texas*
> Designed college preparatory material for presentation and distribution
> Continued the development of college bound website for students

**From Title 1 College Readiness:  May 2012 ($5000)**
*Galveston Independent School District – Galveston, Texas*
> Created flash drives with vital college information for HS students
> Designed college preparatory material for presentation and distribution
> Developed college bound website for students and parents

**Students in Detention: College Material? Yes: Dec. 2008 ($3800)**
*Texas City Independent School District – Texas City, Texas*
> Guided students in detention through the college preparation process
> Conducted application/financial aid workshops for students
> Conducted parental workshops

**College Preparatory for Youth at Risk: Dec. 2007 ($3,500)**
*Texas City Independent School District – Texas City, Texas*
> Provided college/career assessments, and academic strategies for at-risk

**SCHOLARSHIPS/HONORS**

2013 – Chi Sigma Iota International Honor Society
2012 – Academic Educators Scholarship
2012 - International Study Abroad Scholarship
2011 - Emerging Scholars Honors Program: Sam Houston State University

**PUBLICATIONS**

Hart, L. (2015). Promoting resilience using solution focused sandtray techniques. Texas
    Counseling Association.

Hart, L. (2012). Perceived discrimination towards undocumented immigrants in Costa
    Rica, as compared to those in the United States: A phenomenological study.
    (in submission)

Hart, L. & Garza, Y. (2012). Perceived self-efficacy of teachers after the death of a
    student: A phenomenological study. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying 66(4),*
    317-327. doi: org/10.2190/OM.66.4b

**<u>Dissertation</u>**

Hart, L. (2016). Factors contributing to academic resilience of former homeless high
    school students: A phenomenological study.

# **<u>PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS</u>**

## **<u>International</u>**

Hart, L. (Oct. 2016) No lines in the sand: A multicultural approach to sandtray therapy.
    European Branch of American Counseling Association. Geneva, Switzerland.

Hart, L. (Oct. 2016) The Sound of Music: Incorporating music in therapy. European
    Branch of American Counseling Association. Geneva, Switzerland.

Hart, L. (Oct. 2015) Promoting resilience using solution focused sandtray techniques.
    European Branch of the American Counseling Association. Naples, Italy.

Hart, L. (Oct. 2015) Promoting resilience in students after the death of a peer:
    Introduction to the TEAR model. European Branch of the American Counseling
    Association. Naples, Italy.

Hart, L. M. & Rosenblad, S. (Aug. 2013). Multicultural Sandtray: Fostering the English
    language. Universidad de Costa Rica. San Jose, Costa Rica.

Hart. L. (June 2013). Sandtray therapy. (June 2013). Universidad de Iberoamericana
    (UNIBE). San Jose, Costa Rica.

## **<u>State/National</u>**

Hart, L. (Jan. 2017) Reporting abuse, neglect, and exploitation to DFPS: What you need
    to know. Galveston ISD counselors, social workers, and licensed psychologists.

Hart, L. (Feb. 2016) College prep in a flash: Introduction of the college admissions
    process. Galveston ISD parental presentation. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L. (June 2016) College prep in a flash: Introduction of the college admissions
    process. Excel Counseling. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L. (Nov. 2015) Promoting resilience in students after the death of a peer:
    Introduction to the TEAR model. Colorado School Counseling Association.
    Colorado Springs, CO.

Hart, L., Carrier, A. (Nov. 2015) Trauma-Informed expressive arts therapy with children: Responding to painful emotional experiences. Texas Counseling Association. Corpus Christi, TX.

Hart, L. (Oct. 2015) Promoting resilience using solution focused sandtray techniques. Region 13 Texas Education Association: Austin, TX.

Hart, L. (Oct. 2015) Promoting resilience in students after the death of a peer: Introduction to the TEAR model. Region 13 Texas Education Association, Austin, TX.

Hart, L. (Mar. 2015) Marketing yourself as a professional counselor. Bay Area Counseling Association. Pasadena, TX.

Hart, L. (Feb. 2015) College prep in a flash: Introduction of the college admissions process. Galveston ISD parental presentation. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L. (Feb 2015) Promoting resilience using solution focused sandtray techniques. Texas School Counseling Association. Galveston, Texas.

Hart, L. (Feb 2015) Promoting resilience in students after the death of a peer: Introduction to the TEAR model. Texas School Counseling Association. Galveston, Texas.

Hart, L. (Jan 2015) Introduction to solution focused sandtray therapy. Texas Hill Country Counseling Association. Kerrville, Texas.

Hart, L. (Jan 2015) Promoting resilience in students after the death of a peer: Introduction of the TEAR model. Texas Hill Country Counseling Association. Kerrville, Texas.

Hart, L. (Nov 2014) Promoting resilience using solution focused sandtray techniques. Texas Counseling Association. Dallas, Texas. To be published by TCA.

Hart, L. (Nov 2014) Promoting resilience in students after the death of a loved one: The TEAR model. Texas Counseling Association. Dallas, Texas.

Hart, L. (Aug 2014). No lines in the sand: Multicultural approach to sandtray therapy. AMCD/CCA Alaskan Educational Conference Cruise

Hart, L. (Jun 2014). (Proposal accepted) Multicultural Sandtray. Innovative techniques in counseling. Las Vegas, NV.

Hart, L. M. & Rosenblad, S. (Sep. 2013). Multicultural Sandtray. State University of New York. Oneonta, New York.

Hart, L. M. (June 2014) Fostering resilience in students after the death of a peer: Presentation of the TEAR model. Las Vegas, NV.

Hart, L. M. (Feb. 2014) Fostering resilience in students after the death of a peer: Presentation of the TEAR model. Texas School Counseling Association. Houston, TX.

Hart, L. M. & Polonyi, M. A. (Oct. 2013) Fostering resilience in students after the death of a peer: Presentation of the TEAR model. Bay Area Counseling Association. Pasadena, TX.

Hart, L. M. (Oct. 2013). Fostering resilience in students after the death of a peer: Presentation of the TEAR model to teachers of GISD. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L.M. (Oct. 2013). College-bound Workshop for parents of GISD. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L. M. (Oct. 2013). Fostering resilience in students after the death of a peer: Development of TEAR model. University of Texas Medical Branch. Galveston, TX

Hart, L. M. (Oct. 2013). Counseling techniques using the Sandtray method. University of Texas Medical Branch. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L. M. (Feb-Mar, 2013) Completing the financial aid process for college: Workshops for students and parents. Galveston ISD. Galveston, TX.

Lillard, N. & Hart, L. (Jan. 2013). Reflections on the supervision process: Creative techniques to promote professional awareness in supervisees. TACES Mid-Winter Conference. Austin, TX

Hart, L. M. (Nov. 2012). How to choose an LPC supervisor: Expectations of supervisor and supervisee. Texas Counseling Association. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L. M. (Nov. 2012). Perceived self-efficacy of teachers after the death of a student. Texas Counseling Association. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L. M. (May, 2012). Post-secondary education for English language learners. CTELL/CBCT Spring Institute. University of Houston – Clear Lake, Houston, TX.

Hart, L. M. (Feb. 2012). Expectations of quality supervision: What to look for in an LPC supervisor. TACES 2012 Mid-Winter Conference: Austin, TX.

Hart, L. M. (May, 2011). Developing a crisis response team. District Counselors Development Workshop: Galveston Independent School District. Galveston, TX.

Hart, L. M. (Nov. 2010). Career and technical education: Best practices. Gulf Coast Tech
    Prep Conference. Houston, TX.

| **PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS** | **ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP** |
|---|---|
| Bay Area Counseling Association | President |
| American Counseling Association | Member |
| Texas Counseling Association | Director: Social Services '12 |
| Texas Career Development Association | Member |
| Texas Assn. of Counselor Educators & Supervisors | Member |
| Texas School Counselors Association | Member |
| Galveston Chamber of Commerce Education Com. | Member |
| Chi Sigma Iota International Honor Society | Awards Committee Chair '14 |
| NACADA | Member |